

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Sunday, May 30, 2021

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Tennessee Volunteers

Tony Vitello

Postgame Press Conference



Arkansas - 7, Tennessee - 2

TONY VITELLO: Tough one for everyone involved with our program to lose. The least you can say, there was a clear-cut winner today, so kudos to Arkansas. And then for us, the challenge has already started. The guys are showering up. As soon as they got different clothes on, our program, along with 63 other lucky ones, need to start getting ready for next weekend.

I appreciate all the Vol fans that came out. I know they were louder at the end. I don't know who had more representatives, but it really doesn't matter. It made for an incredible environment for everyone who was here, the players, TV. I appreciate everyone who made that drive. I know we didn't do what fans wanted us to do, but those who came down this morning, I appreciate it.

I know my mom and dad even surprised me, so that was huge. Appreciate all the parents of our guys riding that out. My mom's a sweetheart. She's everyone's favorite when she's out and about, probably because she didn't wash their mouths out with soap like I got. Anyone who knows my dad knows he's an OG. I appreciate them, as well as all the other parents, sticking with our guys. It's my opinion, but I think baseball parents spend more money and more time being around. Hopefully, no one hates me for saying that. It's the sport I coach, but it seems like that's the case. Certainly a lot of appreciation from my end. That's what I got.

Q. Can you get a sense of the mood for the guys right now? Obviously, a tough one to lose today, but with so much kind of out there going forward, I would imagine the turnaround can be pretty quick.

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, I wanted a quick turnaround. I don't think they did. I think they were in love with the environment today, the opportunity to do something. You saw the way they played. I mean, if there's ever a situation

for your team to quit, it's with the Golden Spikes award winner on the mound and a pretty sizable lead.

We got guys trying to back pick on their own, quality at-bats against a guy who's been tough on everybody all year long. So they were still wrapped up emotionally in that game. Unfortunately, in my position, I've got to hide mine, and you want a quick turnaround.

I think it will take a bus ride for our guys to soak up the whole deal. Somewhere around the good city of Chattanooga, they'll start laughing or saying the things they enjoyed what happened here. The bitterness of the loss won't go away, but these guys have kind of shown, after a Saturday loss and we go into a Sunday or after a Game 1 tourney loss, they seem to get motivation from stuff like that.

Again, maybe they can relax and be kids on the back half of that trip and then slowly start to build some motivation for tomorrow. We'll see where we're at and who we got, but really it's going to be all about just preparing for Friday, kind of like it would be on a normal week when we don't have a midweek game.

Q. Was there anything new that you learned about this team in its first experience playing five games in five days? You referenced the players maybe having some happy moments around Chattanooga thinking back on the highlights of this. What were the highlights for you?

TONY VITELLO: Getting to be around our guys each day. You don't know when it's going to go away. I know that's kind of true in life, but you start getting into May, no matter what program it is across the country, your days may end, even if you win the National Championship, it's going to be over.

This is kind of that group, staff, players included, you all just want to hang out as often as possible. So we've got extra days to do that. But more importantly, we got to see what we could do against guys like Sims, Kopps again -- I could say a bunch of other names -- and then compete against a Florida team that was on a pretty dang good run



with what they've done and what they're capable of. I could go on and on. There's an assortment of things that will help us for next weekend and the program beyond.

And the number one thing was today. Today's different. I told them, I warned them, I said, I'm going to try to keep my heart rate normal during that anthem, but you're going to want to run through a brick wall, and then that flyover happens that I forgot about, and you need to learn to deal with that stuff. You can certainly do it well the first go round, but it's kind of a safe bet in Vegas you'll be a little bit better the second go round when you handle that stuff.

Individually, our kids have been great. Christian Scott, we knew he could do that stuff, Booker, we knew. Maybe on the pitching side of things, you got a little pitching lesson there. My man Mabrey can handle anything. He's a tough kid. We can use him in the postseason. Jason Rackers, it's been a grind just with the fluctuations of how his career's gone with us, it hasn't been ideal, but it could go out on a sweet note because he's certainly showed that he can pitch on a big stage.

Q. Tony, it was just announced that Camden Sewell, Connor Pavolony, Luc Lipcius, and Mac Ferguson were all on the All Tournament team. What did you see out of those four guys this week? Second part of the question too, the environment you saw today in Hoover, how much are you looking forward to that next weekend at home at the regional, and how does that play a factor?

TONY VITELLO: Apologies to Camden, and then we kind of held the ceremony up there. Commissioner Sankey is waiting with his trophy. He wasn't happy, so he darted up the tunnel. He's already in flats and was going to shower up. We had to bring him back out there. It was cool to see those four guys get some individual recognition. I think a couple of those guys maybe had some hits after their teammates wore down the pitcher a little bit. It's kind of a group effort with these guys at all times. It's nice that some guys got tapped on the shoulder.

Really what it means, Luc is playing his best ball. He's really a dangerous hitter, always has been, but he's kind of himself right now. I think it's appreciation for what Pav does as a leader, as a catcher, offensively. Camden Sewell was like Billy Chapel yesterday. All in all, it's good. I leave out Fergie, but the guy's a winner. He's just a winner. That's what he is. It doesn't matter whether he's putting up stats or not, but he's a winner. Fortunate to have him around.

It kind of whets the appetite a little bit for what can come next weekend, but it will be different. It's different when

you're at home. The good thing is, again, our guys have got a taste of it against a couple of conference opponents of what Lindsey Nelson stadium can be like. I think it will be even bigger. People will be tailgating. They'll add some seats. It's why you fight all year long for home field advantage. The great -- there's a number they put up on the network that I was going to refer to, but the bottom line is, if you can win 15 games in this league, it's a hell of a year. If you can win 17, you're going to play at home, like we will next weekend, I believe.

Q. Tony, do you feel like you guys deserve to be -- I don't know how you're going to answer this. Do you think you deserve to be the No. 2 national seed coming out of this week in Hoover?

TONY VITELLO: I think the guys feel like that we did lose another conference series, but the guys feel like this is the best team in the country. They would have been the No. 1 national seed even if they wouldn't have done anything here. So it's kind of what you measure yourself up against. It's why recruits say yes to the SEC. They want to see how they stack up against the best in the country, and our guys, there's no secrets.

Now, there's obviously other great teams out there, and everybody's a threat when you get to March for basketball and then this month for baseball bleeding into June, but I think you call it a ruler if you want, whatever measuring stick you need, they have exactly what they needed. From here on out, it will be preparation, hopefully, that pays off for us.

Q. Are you kind of happy with how the week went in terms of not overtaxing guys going into regionals? I know today was kind of your first whole staff game, but in general, are you pleased with where the arms stand going into next weekend?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, 60 was the ish number with Will, happy we got some guys some reps. I feel -- I wouldn't be -- I don't know if I'd have a job if it wasn't for Hunley, so I feel bad about that situation not working out the way it did. In essence, trying to guard him or protect him a little bit actually ended up kind of putting him in a situation that he would have been better off maybe if we'd managed to situation a little bit.

Call that the one regret, if you will, but we kind of had a vision for what we wanted to do, and a lot of it worked out. Also, a lot of things came to the forefront of, okay, there are no question marks if this guy does this, if this guy starts, if we bring this guy in, can he do it? Can you come out of a difficult situation in a regional? Those questions were answered a bit.

