

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Tuesday, May 24, 2022

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Florida Gators

Coach Kevin O'Sullivan

Brandon Sproat

Colby Halter

Postgame Press Conference

Florida 2, South Carolina 1

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Well, that was a good ol' fashioned pitching duel. It's a shame somebody has got to lose that game because I thought both starters were just outstanding. I thought Brandon, that's the best he's pitched here. I think it's a career high for innings pitched.

I talked to Jeff Cardozo, our radio guy, after the game, and to know where Brandon started from his freshman year to where he is now is just awesome. This is why you get into this profession, to hopefully help guys get better and see the progress that they've made. But he was certainly special tonight.

Ryan Slater was special as well. Offensively we struggled quite a bit, but a lot of that had to do with Will Sanders. Sometimes you've got to tip your cap.

It was good to see Colby get the winning hit there at the end, and we did just enough offensively and we're excited we're moving on to tomorrow.

Q. What's it like participating in a pitchers' duel like that going back and forth?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, I mean, it's fun. You go toe to toe with the other team. You just go out there and attack every single pitch.

Q. Colby, as you went into extra innings what was the message to the offense in trying to close that one out?

COLBY HALTER: Yeah, Brandon pitched his butt off all night so we really wanted to win it for him. And definitely this tournament is a big deal so we knew we were going to



close it out and really glad I got to do it, and it was good.

Q. What advice have you given to some of the younger guys in this group about this week and going through the emotions of --

COLBY HALTER: Yeah, there's a lot of fun stuff that goes along with it at the hotel. All the teams are there so you get to see everyone around the league. We're here for business, we're here to win, so that's something that we told the young guys for sure.

BRANDON SPROAT: Another thing that we told them is whatever happened in the regular season, that's all behind. This is the start of a new season. You've got to start fresh, put everything from your mind, and move on.

Q. Colby, the last couple months have not been perfect, and you've had your struggles, but you still found ways to be really productive, and tonight was another one of those nights. What do you have to do when you aren't necessarily perfect at the plate to make sure you find ways to make sure you're contributing?

COLBY HALTER: You know something that our coaching staff has done a really good job of, especially Chuck Jeroloman, when you're struggling at the plate, you know something you can always bring is defense, and I feel like I've done a really good job of that. And being a great teammate is something you can always do, hustling is something you can always do. So I really pride myself on doing those things and good things happen to people that put in the work and do stuff like that. So yeah.

Q. How does it feel to be in the position you're in tonight when you are able to provide that winning knock and you get the ball to the outfield and it allows you to win the game?

COLBY HALTER: Yeah, obviously it's a great feeling. Something you dream of as a kid is hitting a walk-off in any setting, but the SEC tournament is a big stage for sure. But yeah, feel really happy and ready to come out tomorrow and go to battle with our guys. Love doing that



every single day.

Q. You talked about Brandon's progressions. What have you seen the last couple years, and mainly just like the last few weeks? He's been a totally different guy the last few weeks than he was earlier in the year. What are you seeing from him developmentally?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I think it's pretty simple. It all goes back to his fastball command. Now he's got different options to go to behind in the count. He's got two definitive breaking balls, his curve and his slider, and if one is not on on a certain night, he can go to the other one. He's got a really good changeup, as well. But I think it's the mental game that he's probably taken the biggest jump. It's a confidence thing. He's always had a really good arm, but the ability to be consistent week in and week out is probably what's been the biggest difference.

But it's not been easy this year. We lost basically -- we lost our whole weekend rotation, and now we're asking somebody to not only pitch on the weekend but to lead our staff, and he's been able to do that.

Q. You touched on Sproat's confidence and the mental aspect of the game. He was the first Florida pitcher to pitch eight complete innings this season. How did you instill that confidence in him and keep it up as he went that distance?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: You mean during tonight's game? I didn't say a word to him. I mean, I don't really say a whole lot. Especially when he was going as good as he was going. Only thing I could do was probably screw it up at that point, so just leave him alone.

Q. Resilience has kind of been a theme for you in the last couple weeks. You've talked about it so many times with this team. For you guys to get the win the way you did, you tie the game, you go into extras, and just pull it off, what does that mean to this team as far as momentum goes to get into the rest of the tournament now?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I mean, any team that's successful at the end of the year is going to go through stretches where they struggle, and that adversity is certainly going to help any team moving forward. I go back to '17, we opened SEC play against Auburn when we won the national championship, and we got swept on the road to open up SEC play.

Those scars, so to speak, they help you at this time of the year, and hopefully we've learned our lesson and we have gotten better. And like I said, we've had a lot of moving

parts. We've had to redo our entire weekend rotation, not just one guy, not just two, but we've had to redo our whole weekend rotation. We're very, very young in the bullpen. We've made some major decisions with moving Sterlin into second and putting Ty out in right field and moving Colby to third.

So we've done a lot of different things to help us be in a better position. But at the end of the day, the players got to go out and play, and they're the ones who put in the hard work, and the bottom line is sometimes you make decisions as a coaching staff that work and sometimes you make decisions that don't work.

But it seems like we've made some decisions here over the last month or so that have seemed to help us from a pitching standpoint and offensively.

But all those lessons learned through the first half of the year, I'm hoping they're going to help us moving forward.

Q. What goes through your mind on the holdup at third base in the 10th inning there?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I didn't see it. All the players were jumping up in front of me, so I didn't see it.

Q. How big is it for Sproat to go eight innings tonight instead of having to go to the bullpen a little bit earlier in a situation like this week where it's so important to get the most out of your pitchers because you're going every day?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I mean, certainly when you're playing in the play-in game on Tuesday, obviously it's an extra game, and then you're facing probably someone who's No. 1 when you start the tournament on Wednesday. But our bullpen is intact. We have extended the rosters to 30 instead of 27 for this tournament, so we've added three more arms to that mix. But yeah, it's big. And Ryan was really good tonight. I don't know how many pitches he threw. He threw 14 pitches or 24 pitches looks like. But yeah, so he's able to close out the game tomorrow if we get in that position.

Q. There were a ton of strikeouts today in both games, 28 in the first game, 22 in your game. Is that a testament to the quality of pitching that you're seeing in this league right now?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, I mean, we knew -- I had the opportunity to work with USA team this past summer, so I had Will there, as well. I was very familiar with him and how talented he is, and he's extremely competitive. We hit a line drive off his -- looked like off his glove or off his

shoulder, and he waved off his pitching coach or his head coach and said, I'm good. He battled and he was extremely competitive tonight.

If you look back at his lines throughout the year, he's given a lot of teams a lot of fits. I do think our approach was not great tonight, and we'll address it as a staff, but at the same time we're facing a really good arm, so he had a lot to do with that, as well.

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