

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Auburn Tigers

Coach Butch Thompson

Carson Skipper

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky 3, Auburn 1

Q. You were feeling it early, seven strikeouts, only three innings of work. Would you have liked to go on a little longer?

CARSON SKIPPER: You know, going into the game, that was kind of the job that we had discussed, for me to come out and open it up and then just pass the baton along and kind of it be a bullpen game.

Q. Carson, thoughts on the disappointing early exit from this tournament and how you guys regroup?

CARSON SKIPPER: You know, there's always room for improvement. Kentucky just out-offensed us today. Same with on the mound. They only gave up one run, and it was that Sonny home run. There was not a ton of offense by either team, but at the same time there's still room for improvement for everybody.

Q. You mentioned the pitching plans worked out pretty good until the last inning. Do you feel like you did what you need to do today?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, absolutely. I think everybody executed pretty well today. Trace came in after me, and I think he gave up one, and then Swilling came in and did his job, same with Allsup at the end.

Q. Carson, what are the next few days like now in terms of waiting a little longer than you guys might have wanted to before you see what the regional will shake out to be? What are you focusing on the next few days?

CARSON SKIPPER: You know, get back to our process, getting back, hitting the weights, throwing bullpens, getting

what we need to do to get ready and be prepared for next weekend.

Q. You talked about the approach kind of coming off last weekend, kind of carried over today. Harney was kind of that guy today again, wasn't he?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, I can't give any more credit to the other side than Harney and Guilfoil, from the weekend and then again from today. That was a pretty gutsy performance by Harney.

I think we had runners at first and second two times and was not able to get the guy moved up to third base. I think that was huge. Sonny absolutely had a big hit in the moment there, but if you -- we can't subtract that, but if we had not have executed that, that would be more disappointing. But the fastball, we just cannot get there on the fastballs, and we're popping it up in center field, right field, right side of the field by right-handed hitters. You'll have to be sharper than that and get your bat in position.

But I don't want to take anything away from Harney and Guilfoil's performance during this whole four-game stretch that we played them.

Q. For Blake, what do you think was the difference for him from those -- he comes in, gets out of the jam in the 7th, gets through the 8th. What do you think was the difference in the 9th?

BUTCH THOMPSON: I don't know, they saw him two innings. Maybe just seeing him enough. They both looked like porous pitches where it was a changeup up with Anu and then a fastball to Fogle. I think Anu's swing once he hit that, I don't think it was the right pitch, although I think it was a negative pitch to Fogle. He had much more success with the breaking ball at Kentucky. He hit the one home run against Allsup with two strikes on a fastball in Lexington.

So I was kind of surprised to see us make that pitch, not that you can't throw what you are convicted on. But I just think from the pattern of recent play. Anu's didn't surprise me so much, changeup's probably right pitch to him and

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Plastiak from just playing them, and Fogle was probably not. But I just don't think either was executed. It's not always what you throw, it's where you throw it, and both those pitches to me from looking at the video board looked like they were up out over the plate in both instances there.

Q. I talked to you last year on a podcast and we talked about the depth of the SEC. Just talk about this conference. Obviously looks like now could be 11, 12 teams getting in the NCAA tournament.

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, it's really good, and it doesn't take much to get off. It would take one little arm not there. And we've lost a lot in this league, and for it to still be as competitive as it is and as special as it is, is a credit. You've still got a Kentucky, an Alabama that's fighting for their lives this week, and you can see it in their play.

Estep is top ten rounder at third base and Ritter's a top ten rounder, had two more hits today. Those are special players. And I think Guilfoil was a first-team all-SEC player on that team that's fighting for every inch.

We were in that case last year. We were in a better place three years prior to that. But that's how fine of a line it is in our league where the No. 1 team earlier this year is fighting to get in and deserves to be there, I do believe, and you've got a defending national champion that doesn't make this tournament.

You can keep going down the list of bullet points of explaining how special this league is from a coaching standpoint, from a fan involvement, and absolutely from a roster standpoint top to bottom. I think Major League Baseball opened this year with 93 former SEC baseball players on opening day, Major League rosters. I think the next Power Five conference come in second at like 68. I think that goes to prove the quality of players that are in this league.

Q. How do you feel about your chances to host an NCAA regional for the first time since 2010?

BUTCH THOMPSON: I have no idea. I know we're in a regional. I know we absolutely think we have done enough. I don't know if I'm here to make a case. I think outside of Tennessee and Texas A&M, the last 30 ballgames we're third in that department. We've tied for the third-most wins in the SEC. Now, that'll probably change here in the next few days. So we've maintained a top 10 RPI nationally out of 301 schools for a prolonged period of time. Three games over .500. We've played good baseball.

Absolutely that would be my wish and desire and why you

get up and you coach hard every day and you bring these players along. It'll be out of our hands, and that's what I told the players, and that's why Burkhalter comes in in the seventh. There's no tomorrow. So we laid every chip out on the table to give us a chance to win, and I thought our coaches absolutely continued to put our guys in the right spot, tied it, and didn't do enough to finish it.

But that has not been the offense that we've played. I think we were 2-2 last week. But that's a one-run deal. We hit a couple home runs late to get to three runs and then back in a one-run deal. It's kind of a glaring of where we're putting our bat in positions against really good arms that are throwing well.

Q. You know you're in, but how do you balance that with trying to stay sharp knowing that you've got a week, nine days or so until you would play again?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, I think there's a little break, an exhale, and I think there's back to finding a little bit of rhythm with everything. I think there's a push. I think you push the team one more time. I think you have to be mindful of setting the arms over the weekend. I think we'll be prepped and ready and then start tapering once you figure out what the call will be after Sunday or Monday.

I think we'll probably give them a little bit of a break. We'll get back to Auburn tonight, maybe take a day, get back in that weight room. We've got some starters I think thinking about immediately going to what's next, and that would be a Barnett, a Gonzales, the guys that did not compete. They've got to have their turn to pitch before we line them back up.

But I think we give them a little break, but then I think we'll come out pretty hard, pretty full speed, try to get everybody shortened back up and their head connected with their barrel. Keep playing this defense because that will be required. All three phases will be required. You're going to get down to the 64 best teams in the country, and there's no doubt that this team can play well.

The other positive thing is I tell them there's only four teams standing in their way of competing in Omaha once again. You'll have three other teams in the regional that you've got to figure out how to navigate through, and then one. Being at the last pitch in '17 and winning one in '18 and '19 back-to-back super regionals, I hope that's where they think our program is supposed to figure out a few of these teams.

I respect them and I appreciate them that we get to go out and compete and four teams stand in our way of landing in that final eight in Omaha once again.



Q. Y'all have been so effective at coming back this season. I know it didn't quite work out in the ninth. What did you see in those at-bats? Does it help to go into a regional knowing that that's still what you guys are capable of even if it was maybe a bit of a sour ending to this tournament?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, absolutely. I think we count about 20 of those now, and some of those we probably need a faster start, right? So we probably need to get ahead and stay ahead and contest. But there's a good resilience in our bunch. I thought they were ready to play today, to be honest with you.

But when you wind up with just a few at-bats and you're not getting anything done -- we needed that one big hit, and it really didn't happen until the 8th inning. Sometimes that looks like you're not focused when you're just not having good at-bats. But I think they are, and I think the defense -- and I think that the pitchers competing showed that. We've got to get back to some sharp, clean offense. We look forward to it. It's good to have something to work toward the next few days.

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