

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Wednesday, May 25, 2022

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Nick Mingione

Sean Harney

Oraj Anu

Postgame Press Conference



Kentucky 3, Auburn 1

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, just totally thankful and impressed. I mean, when you think about the fight that our guys showed today, it started with Sean on the mound. All year long, every time that guy has toed the rubber, our team has been confident and he has made pitch after pitch. Just loved the fight from him and the fact that he got a little excited and kept trying to go and pitch.

But just obviously we've got a bunch of guys that just want to keep playing. Thankful for them. Obviously that home run by Sonny was huge. Just obviously proud of the way our guys responded after, because it would have been real easy just to feel like they had all the momentum, but our guys did and they continued to compete. So proud of the way they competed.

Q. Sean, you came out strong today; when did you know you were going to get the start, and how did you prepare your mindset to pitch in such a big game?

SEAN HARNEY: Yeah, a couple days ago. Mindset-wise, I wanted the ball. I was ready for it. So just gave it my all.

Q. How did it feel to have that Big Blue Nation behind you? They were pretty loud today. Vastly outnumbered by the Auburn fans, but they were loud.

SEAN HARNEY: Yeah, they were loud. Yeah, not quite as many as the Auburn fans, but I did hear them, so go BBN.

ORAJ ANU: I say Kentucky fans are really passionate about any sport that we play, so the fact that they traveled all the way down to Hoover, it's a really good thing for our

program.

Q. I know it's baseball, but you guys had long delays, you were going to play late at night, then early in the morning. How do you prepare yourself to kind of get ready for something like that? You all came out really aggressively.

ORAJ ANU: I mean, we've been playing in the rain for the past couple series, so I feel like we're used to rain delays and stuff like this. I don't think it affected us at all. We've just been out there and did our thing.

SEAN HARNEY: Yeah, I mean, we had the day off yesterday. We learned that pretty early. Had to take advantage of the pool, the hot tub, and have a good off-day with the fellas.

Q. You talked about the approach to facing Sonny today. Obviously you guys went right at him and had a very successful outing.

SEAN HARNEY: Yeah, like Coach Coggin says, it's a faceless opponent. I'm just going to go out there and give it my all, attack, and not worry about who I'm facing.

Q. You were kind of quiet for most of the day. Talk about the pitch and what it took to drive that one out of there.

ORAJ ANU: So I had two strikes on me. I had fouled off two changeups already, and my plan with two strikes is just see the ball up, and I got a changeup middle away, and I took my best swing on it. I knew it was gone once I made contact. It felt really good off the bat. It felt really good.

SEAN HARNEY: I think we all knew it was gone.

NICK MINGIONE: To add to what Oraj -- I mean, this is a guy that dealt with adversity. He broke his hamate bone in the middle of the season, and I've seen guys not come back. We missed him, and it showed offensively. He's a special player. Then for him to be able to come back in the middle of the year after breaking his hamate bone and just to get big hit after big hit of late, he deserves it, no



question.

Q. Coach, you said Oraj was the one who hurt his hamate bone?

NICK MINGIONE: Yes, he broke it in the middle of the season.

Q. That was like March?

NICK MINGIONE: It was.

Q. I wanted to ask you, does it concern you at all if they have to go to all single elimination from now on, maybe even seven innings with the rain? Those are possible scenarios. What do you feel about that?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, let me first say that I feel like we've done the best job that you can do getting games in. The weather is hard. I told Herb that; they're doing as good a job as you can do, whether it be on the field, whether it's communicating. It's been the highest level, and it's exactly what you would think.

But I think every team is different. Every team is playing for something. Obviously the Wildcats need more wins, so the more games we can continue to play, I guess I would be all in favor for that.

But like I told the guys, you just can't predict the weather, and it's been really hard. If that's what we have to do, that's what we have to do. If we have to play on the back field and that's what they say we'll do, I'll gladly take our team back there and play. Sometimes there's things you can't control, and the weather is one of them.

We've done as good a job as anybody to try to get games in.

Q. Looking ahead to LSU what do you see from that matchup and have you had a chance to watch them?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, I've been accused of being an optimist, so I've studied the video and tried to prepare. A really good offensive team and a team that not a lot of people gave them a lot of credit at the beginning of the year where they picked them. And the job that Jay Johnson has done has just been phenomenal. It's a really offensive team. You saw that all year long. A team that can pitch and match up really good. There's a reason why they've won as many games as they have in the league. We'll definitely have our hands full against a really quality team.

Q. I want to go back to your comment about Oraj and

him coming back. You talk about adversity all the time. You faced it during the regular season. Now you've got a chance to show what it can do in the postseason. How do you parlay that and continue to try to inspire the team to win and survive and continue to advance?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, you know this, but these guys -- I mean, we're in the development business. We're trying to develop men. That experience that he has went through is going to prepare him for life. This is a guy, this is his last year of college baseball, so this is it for him. He and a bunch of our other guys, they just want to keep playing. I heard in the dugout multiple times, we're not done yet, we want to keep playing.

So when they start spitting those things out, as a coach sometimes you just step back and you just let them go. That's what they want to do. They want to keep playing. Oraj will grow from that experience, and hopefully he's got a lot more at-bats for Kentucky this year.

Q. You mentioned the dugout and I asked the guys about the Big Blue Nation. Talk about the Big Blue Nation. They were loud today. And talk about the locker room, as well. We hear the guys yelling right now.

NICK MINGIONE: Well, our fans have been great. Anybody that's going to travel all the way down here from Lexington deserves to be thanked. We're from wherever. I know we've got fans here in Birmingham. They call it the Big Blue Nation for a reason. Just thankful for them.

I prepped our team before the game, too, that hey, in a lot of ways, I've been here playing Auburn or Alabama and it feels like a home game for them, and we were not going to let that bother us. We were just going to play our game, and that's what they did. And thankful for all the fans that have watched and sent all the messages. I mean, I think I'm -- I don't know how many messages I'm up to, unread messages, but just can't thank all those folks enough.

Q. When did Oraj really start swinging full swing after the hamate do you think?

NICK MINGIONE: You know, what we started doing was we had some guys that maybe were not going to throw on the weekend, and we had some of our red shirts throw. So we were getting him live at-bats. Once he got cleared, we started giving him some live at-bats in practice where he could just get comfortable and swing, and then we got him in for a pinch-hit and then we got him in for a game. We slowly kept trying to give him at-bats so he could get caught up.

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I think you guys know this, too; anytime you're dealing with an injury, there's a confidence factor. There's a confidence factor to know that I have the strength, that I can do it, I can get jammed at 95, and my hand still be good to where I don't feel like I have to cheat. That's what's even more impressive for him. You start thinking about that hamate bone and that surgery, and for him to just be able to hang in there and continue to fight has been good.

But it was a slow process and one that Josh Walker and all of our trainers helped with, and we just brought him along and got him healthy again.

Q. Do you know the LSU hamate bone story?

NICK MINGIONE: I probably should.

Q. Warren Morris.

NICK MINGIONE: Oh, yeah, I do know that. And I do know -- I saw Ben McDonald in the hotel, and I did not know that Skip Bertman said that is the greatest player to ever wear an LSU uniform. So I made sure I told Ben that I saw that, so I do know who their best player ever was according to Skip Bertman.

Q. This SEC pitching is off the charts. It's so good, it's got to give opposing coaches nightmares. Now you have the muscle to kind of counter back with that. I remember talking to you when Cole went down, so I guess my question is what happened? What's the reason for the big turnaround?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, you know, anytime you have injuries, it provides opportunities for other people, and what's happened is we've just started pitching more guys, and they've gotten better with each outing.

I think Dan Roselle has done a great job. I feel like he's learned each guy to where we were able to pitch to each guy's strengths. And really it's just been a staff that has just passed the baton off to the next guy, and we just keep passing it off. Those guys that have stepped into the game, they know their role, they know what they do well, and we try to accentuate that and just keep passing it off.

When you have that many guys hurt, other people have to step up. That's exactly what the guys have done. They've gotten better with each outing, too. Like as you go through each guy, the more we kept putting them out there, the better they've gotten, and that's a credit to them and our players and all their hard work.

Q. I haven't gotten to see you guys play this year in

person but I've watched a lot of Kentucky games. It seems like a lot of the guys that don't get to play, some of the underclassmen, some of the freshmen, they love each other. This team truly loves each other. Just talk about how important that is for your team heading into this -- who knows where it will take you, maybe even Omaha?

NICK MINGIONE: You know what, you're right, there's a brotherhood there. I wasn't sure how that was going to work out. We brought in eight guys from the transfer portal. One thing about Kentucky is we have to recruit from all over the country. I've always said this, to build your roster, it's a lot like a recipe, and you have to have people from all different places. It's much like a bunch of different flavors, right? If everything is the same and everyone is there, it's just bland.

We've been afforded an opportunity based on where we're at where we're able to pull people from all over, even a guy like Fogle from Hawaii and a Thrasher from Connecticut. I've always said it's like a recipe, and when you get a bunch of 18- and now 24-year-olds together and they have a common vision and they create a brotherhood, it's pretty awesome. It usually shows up when it matters the most, and it showed up today, and it showed up last Sunday, too, last Saturday.

Q. Do you and the other coaches, do you all have any kind of say in what happens with the rain and how things are handled with format changes? Do they ask y'all? How does that work?

NICK MINGIONE: I've offered my opinion (laughing), but the ultimate saying -- I don't know. I'm sorry, I don't have a better answer. But I did offer my opinion.

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