

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Sunday, May 29, 2022

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Tennessee Volunteers

Tony Vitello

Luc Lipcius

Drew Gilbert

Camden Sewell

Postgame Press Conference



guys, V and his coaching staff, they came in, they did their thing, and they're great at recruiting and making players better. That's one big thing that they preach is just get better, and it's just really awesome to see it come full circle and now we're on the top of the SEC.

We still have a bit of a ways to go but we'll enjoy it right now, and it's really cool.

Q. Camden, what about Florida and this tournament makes you so dominant?

CAMDEN SEWELL: I'd say the guys behind me. The amount of plays they made today was really special to see. There were a lot of plays I thought that were getting through, balls getting through the outfield, and Corty and Trey and Jorel, Luc, everyone was making plays, so it was really awesome to be a part of.

Q. Camden, Tony has talked about how much you've wanted to be a starter in your career. What did it mean to get the ball today and what did you have working for you?

CAMDEN SEWELL: It meant a lot. I wanted it to say the least, a lot. I didn't actually find out until this morning, so whenever I found out, it was like, all right, it's time to go, and I just enjoyed every minute of it.

Q. How do you balance celebrating this, enjoying this, but also kind of as Luc said, there's a bit of a ways to go to do the things you guys want to finish with?

DREW GILBERT: Yeah, I think for us it's kind of a mindset thing. Obviously really cool to win the SEC tournament but we have bigger goals in mind and still have a lot of baseball in front of us.

LUC LIPCIUS: I think on that note we're really good at separating the celebration from not letting it carry over, so we don't have any of those like championship hangovers, so to speak, so we're going to enjoy it today, but then when we get back to Knoxville, it's grind time.

Q. Camden, when we talked a month ago, what did

TONY VITELLO: Just congrats to our guys. They're good kids. I think they've got what they got coming to them. They work hard as well, so congrats to them. From everybody, thank you to the grounds crew. We were on nightclub hours basically when we were playing, and they got us through this thing, which was tremendous, and it did not disappoint, as always.

I mean, town of Hoover got a sunny bomb. You got Kentucky guys risking life and limb out in the outfield. That Florida/South Carolina pitching matchup was outstanding. Alabama kind of a hometown team was on fire. It did not disappoint. Glad to be a part of it. Just glad to be a part of the league in general. It may not always seem like it, but I promise you, I'm humbled and feel very fortunate every day just to be a part of this league. It's unbelievable what it does for you if you're a competitor and an athlete, and I was not a good enough athlete as these guys or anyone else to even sniff this league as a player. So I feel blessed every day to have an opportunity to be in it, and I'm also not foolish. When you're in it, it was not a forgiving league so there is no safe zone.

But again, if you like to play ball or any sport, you like to compete, it's a great place to be.

Q. Luc, you've been here the longest. When you think back to when you got here and now finishing your career, sweeping the SEC regular season and winning the tournament, what does that mean to you?

LUC LIPCIUS: You know, it means everything. When I came in here, we weren't really expected to do much. We were kind of the laughingstock of the SEC. And then these



you do between then and now to get this starting job in the biggest game so far of the year?

CAMDEN SEWELL: Honestly, I think that's up to him to decide who starts, but from back then, it was just like, there was a point in time where -- there was a point where you start thinking a lot. At some point you've just got to be like, here's what I've got and this is what I'm going to do, and whatever happens happens.

Q. In the middle of the game when they walked Jordan Beck to face you with the bases loaded, what's your mindset going through that at-bat?

DREW GILBERT: I think in that situation you try to learn from your previous two at-bats. Obviously once it gets two strikes, just kind of competing at that point. You've got a lot of things going around you, crowds getting into it, just trying to slow my heart rate down as much as I can and just stay within my swing.

Q. Drew, you being so consistent in that 4 hole, what have you worked on most this year and what are the results that you've seen?

DREW GILBERT: Yeah, I think for me specifically and a lot of guys, it's trying to get as many quality at-bats as possible. It kind of simplifies things, and even when you get out, you can still take things from your at-bats no matter what.

Q. A bit of a different look from the Florida starting pitcher today. What adjustments did you make to still have a super productive day?

LUC LIPCIUS: It's not the first time we've seen a slower throwing lefty. We had to sit on it, and as you saw, we barreled some balls. We barreled balls really well, just got caught. It's kind of stick with your approach. You can't get too big, and I think we did a really good job of sticking with what we had to do, and then Seth of course lays down a beautiful bunt, and then this guy when he comes up with based loaded, you know it's going to be fireworks. So it's pretty cool.

DREW GILBERT: Yeah, I think early, including myself, kind of just -- chasing pitches out of the zone, but I think kind of going back to getting pitches in the zone and trying to put good swings on it and kind of just keep stacking throughout the game.

Q. Drew, you were committed to a prominent program before you decided to come to Tennessee. When you reflect, what was the vision that Tony and his staff were trying to sell you on, and was it the vision that

came through today?

DREW GILBERT: Yeah, it was this. He's as competitive as anyone I've ever met in my life, and I'm really competitive, too, and I know he wants to win. I think the plan was to win right away.

Q. Luc, if I'm not mistaken, I think y'all stayed in the dugout and watched Arkansas celebrate a year ago after they won it. How did you internalize watching them celebrate that, and how good did it feel to flip the script this year?

LUC LIPCIUS: Yeah, you know, I don't really remember what happened last year. It was kind of a blur. I remember just wanting to get out of there as quickly as possible. That one really stung. I think a bunch of the older guys, a bunch of the people that have been here knew what it felt like to lose.

What was really cool about this year is when things weren't let's say going our way the first few innings and we weren't scoring, there wasn't really a sense of oh, my God, and tightening up. There was more this loose and calm and focused.

I think if we can carry that through the rest of the postseason, we're going to have a lot of success.

Q. There was a lot of emotion that you all showed this tournament that I don't think we usually see from this group. What kind of led to that shift where we saw so much emotion from you guys?

DREW GILBERT: Yeah, I think kind of just getting into postseason baseball. You've got atmospheres that we haven't necessarily played in all year. Obviously LSU, when we played LSU there was a ton of people there and it was an awesome environment and it kind of carried over the next few days.

LUC LIPCIUS: Yeah, I think this is the most passionate and emotional team I've ever been a part of. Throughout the whole season we really loved celebrating. With that we don't too emotional in the game. When something good happens, we cheer, but it's not like we don't let the let's say the biggest crowds affect us. So we love each other, have great team chemistry, and we really want everyone to do well, and I think that's where all the passion and emotion comes from. We want to see each other succeed.

CAMDEN SEWELL: I think also it comes from last year, what happened. Being able to stay on top and come out with a win today was huge.



Q. Drew, as good as most of your at-bats have been recently and throughout this week, there may have been a couple last night and the first couple today that did not go the way you wanted them to go, and then you get down 0-2 again. How do you control things then and be like, okay, I've got to get this thing sorted?

DREW GILBERT: Yeah, for sure last night even at-bats today, they were chasing pitches out of the zone, not something I feel like I've done a lot all year. But Coach V came up to me I think my third at-bat and told me to stop thinking and just go play. That helped a lot.

Q. Drew, that late homer, just take us through what you saw on that pitch, and even through the delayed bat flip, how was that?

DREW GILBERT: Yeah, got to a 2-0 count and we always talk about 2-0, get your swing off, have conviction in your thoughts and I was hunting a fast ball. With that I had to make sure it was fair or foul, but then I don't really know what to say there.

Q. Normally when you think of Hoover, you see a lot of purple and gold in the crowd, the LSU fans, they take over this place. It felt like Vol Nation took over this place this week. What does this fan base mean to you guys?

CAMDEN SEWELL: It's pretty surreal to see. I remember last year I think we got like the championship game, there was a lot of people there, but the last few games here have been pretty special. Everyone that traveled, we can't thank you enough for the support.

LUC LIPCIUS: Yeah, it's a tribute to Vol Nation and how much they're supporting us. It's really cool to step back and look in the crowd and you see almost complete orange, even when we're playing a team like LSU. It's awesome that they're getting so into it, they're getting so into baseball and I know they're going to represent in Lindsey Nelson through the rest of our run.

DREW GILBERT: Yeah, I don't think any of us can thank them for how much they help us. Honestly it really helps having a huge crowd behind you, and we love our passionate they are.

Q. Some of the names you guys had on this team last year, Max Ferguson, Jake Rucker, Liam Spence, and then to come into this year and win all these awards regular season and in this tournament, what does that say how you guys have brought together after losing so much?

LUC LIPCIUS: You know, there's always the narrative, oh, we lost a lot. But really there's just guys behind the scenes that are waiting to get their shot. I think that's what we're seeing this year is we've got guys like Trey, Cortland, Jorel, they're all sitting behind the scenes learning from these everyday players and they're just waiting. So it's really cool when they actually get their shot and they take it and run with it, and it's awesome to see the success they're having.

But I don't think anyone was worried about losing those guys because we knew the pieces that we had.

TONY VITELLO: I hate to interject, but I started rattling off some names and I left off Chad Dallas which you can't forget that guy. And then Rucker you reminded me of, it was on the spot postgame, I don't think we would have been able to win this game without that group. As much as these guys took on the mission of we really would like to separate ourselves and be 2022 team because the fans really loved last year's team, I think a piece of it is still there, kind of an education piece.

So like Luc said, other guys are waiting to learn, and those guys helped, and it's kind of fun, not apparent, so I know it's kind of crazy when the kids start repeating things you say, like my sister that's got a foul mouth, but there's a couple freshmen that played today that act way different than when we recruited them, and it's because of these guys.

Q. Tony, when you have a roster like this that there's not everybody is always going to get what they want, and for a guy like Sewell to kind of stay bought in, whatever role comes to him, and then get a reward today, what's that feel like as a coach to see a guy stick through with things?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, I mean, it feels tremendous, but it's also evidence. You can say some cliché things as a coach. Sometimes you kind of have to. But there's real depth on this team as there are on other teams, but a lot of times it'll vanish because guys get wrapped up in themselves. I think you have to have sincere brotherhood or a bond going on in the locker room. It kind of trickles down to where it's out of our control where you go out to eat after games with parents and maybe I pulled a guy too early or maybe we shouldn't have bunted or something like that, and I just think whatever has kind of gone on again with leadership from guys that could Lipcius brothers together started the whole thing, there's a tight bond, I think, where people value other teammates they have and they put them above themselves.

Q. How nice is it to have players like Drew and Evan and the rest of the team that you know the effort is

going to be there every single time out?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, I think you always want to win. You may strategize a little differently if you're going to rest a guy or pull a pitcher earlier, but all these kids want to win each game they play, it's just a matter to what extent, and fortunately we don't have Dean Craig, our chaplain, he had a good message for the guys today about effort and attitude. And it reinforced some things and he kept saying he sees all this stuff. It's nice to not have to worry about those two things. That's rare. They take care of it on a high level.

Q. There were a couple moments I wanted you to take me through. You went off into the dugout by yourself to put on the shirt and hat. What was that moment like for you? And after everything you went down the line and just thanked kids, fans and everybody for being there. Why was that important for you to do?

TONY VITELLO: Just because I think we want to accomplish a lot as a program. I don't think we've mapped out any one thing. But we've said repeatedly, we can't do it alone. You talk about other programs that have had success here, we've got to have people that have our backs. I think they see that our kids, as we were just talking, they have their backs in a very tight knit fashion and that's why they take to these guides or gravitate to them or buy a silly T shirt or Kirby's mustache is all over the place because they see it and they can feel it and then they buy in and all of a sudden it's kind of a big deal. It almost becomes life force is kind of dramatic but it kind of becomes this thing. I wanted to thank those people for that.

Then the first question as far as going in the dugout, I really was just kind of changing out, and I didn't know what to do, to be honest with you. Coach Anderson and myself were on opposite sides of the dugout in one of these things, and his squad won. So he's got more experience at stuff like this. Not that I was Jim Valvano running around lost but I was kind of taking a minute to gather, I guess.

Q. What does today mean in terms of accomplishments? I know you want to win more, but outside of one weekend you couldn't ask for a better regular season or conference tournament.

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, you want accomplishments. You could just go in the cage and swing and get a little better with your swing and accomplish something or maybe it's even something poor and you take confidence from the things that you accomplish and then when you don't do so well, you can say the old, you win or you learn. You've got to learn from those lessons.

This just happens to be on a bigger stage, but there was other wins throughout the year. I could go into different teams or whatever, that were big moments, and you take confidence from it.

When things don't go well your way, you've got two roads you can go down, you can be more determined to do better the next go around or you can be frustrated and let it sink you. Fortunately we've got a bunch of guys with a high level of determination.

Q. When have you seen Drew grow the most from last year to this year, what all he's put together?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, an easy one that everyone now knows in the country, just managing his emotions. Again, I just talked about hitting in the cage. Sometimes you get guys that in the course of a round get too fired up even just doing that, but he started to use the whole field a ton more, and you saw -- he got an award today, guys were on base for him for one thing, but he got an award today for driving the ball down the line one way and driving a ball as far as you can go down the line the other way. He's really kind of become a complete hitter, and I think you can't do that unless you're a complete hitter physically, which clearly he's worked on, and then also on the mental side, as well.

Q. In the past talking about the history of this program, you've mentioned the name Rod Delmonico. To think you're the first coach to bring and SEC Tournament title back to Tennessee since him, what does that mean to you?

TONY VITELLO: It means a lot. You'd like to be mentioned in the same breath as somebody that has a huge legacy. I kind of joke about some of our guys being mentioned with Todd. If you look at the wall, you look at the accomplishments, we haven't sniffed anything that Coach Delmonico or those teams have done, but it's nice to refresh people's memories. They bring it up, the last time I was at a game or the last time I saw this.

We didn't set out too many goals when we got the job, but that was one of them. There's a blueprint there for how he did things and how some other guys had success. So you want to copy that, and you also want to see Vol Nation -- Hoover is very happy that Vol Nation was here. Probably some commerce in there. It's a heavy handed group, so they need to corner somebody with MLB and get Todd Helton in the Hall of Fame.

Q. Talk about last year, how that ended against Arkansas. What do you think your team learned from that experience that led to the success you had this



week?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, a little bit, the simple thing is the team that plays better is going to win. You can talk about other storylines or get fired up or you can get a lead or you can get down, but I think Luc was the one that kind of said it, like you've got to just show up and play. While the game comes with a great label and a lot of fanfare, I think I talked about it with the ESPN guys, I don't want to repeat myself, but that stuff adds to it. It's a part of it. It makes it better. But it doesn't change what you have to do. You have to come and you have to play the brand of baseball that we want to play, which each team in our league is probably going to try and do similar things and then each team also has a little bit of their brand name. I think at this point we've kind of established that a little bit.

So it's show up to the park and do that, and then we'll see where it gets you.

Q. All week long we've highlighted how special this team is and just the brotherhood that they have and how much they love each other. At this point describe what this team means to you.

TONY VITELLO: It's my life. My family is here. My parents, God love them, they're probably like, when are you going to spend some time with me? But there's a lot of requirements as it relates to maybe taking them to work out or do scouting report stuff. Compared to our support staff, I don't do nearly as much, but it's a full-time job. So during the spring, it's literally your livelihood.

They are unique. I think the way they go about it, it's a really tight group. But if there's a team that played here, again, I kind of started with it at this point, they all love each other, including Florida's roster, I'm looking at some names, and they're all going to play with passion. It's to what extent are you willing to do it throughout the good and bad and then how determined are you going to be to kind of hold on to that. I've seen programs and maybe even been part of teams where it kind of vanishes as time goes on, but this deal seems to be gaining strength.

Q. What did Camden show you to earn the start today and how do you assess his start?

TONY VITELLO: A text message. I'm a big text message guy. We obviously talk on the phone a lot with recruiting, but I've done my fair share -- actually I could tell some stories, but I've done my fair share. So a direct text of, "I want the ball."

Like I said, it was kind of cool. I met with the guys when we stretched over at Hoover High. Thank you to those

folks for taking care of us, and just said we're fortunate. We've got options and then you've also got guys that are saying, give me the ball. As a player you're crazy to not at least ask. But the way he did it and knowing the kid, it was what he wanted to do.

Now, I'd be lying if I said the plan was to go out there and throw five innings. He already threw there for us once and also got hot in another game. We were really kind of watching that pitch count, and then too, it was nice to see him smiling at me because he was mad at me in the dugout, and he was worse than Burns last night. Again, you'd rather have guys that want to be out there than not out there.

Q. Some of your players touched on it, but how difficult is it to face a softer throwing lefty like you guys saw today and what did you see from him in the early innings before you were able to open it up?

TONY VITELLO: Well, it's unique. A team brings in a submarine guy or we're blessed to have some guys. Ben Joyce comes out there, it's very unique. So that's the big thing.

Sometimes it doesn't guarantee you, but sometimes when something is unique, you have to adapt to it, and during that little period, if you have to adapt or adjust, that means you might be frustrated. You can either get in that frustration pool and dive in head first and wade around in it or you can kind of just figure out what's going on and keep going. Again, I think Luc, man, he's well spoken, smart kid, he's an engineer. I think he said it, you kind of just got to keep playing and ride out the storm. You can't go too far in one direction or another.

It was unique. He did an incredible job for his team, and I'm sure he's got a bright future with them. But our guys did kind of stay on task, and they could have gone the other way.

Q. I'm sure you'll be knocking on wood here, but how do you feel about where your team is physically right now, the arms especially, but also position players, any nicks, bruises, anything that's worrying you?

TONY VITELLO: I mean, I think Coach Anderson has kind of led things -- Richard Jackson, who pitched for us, he's down there in the bullpen, his communication level and how he handles business is at an all-time high. I've got to just sit back there and take the information and see where we're at with the pitchers, and I think we've used a bunch of guys in a bunch of different roles.

I don't feel like we've gassed anybody out or went to an

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

extreme with the guys. Feel good about all that. The only guy would be Evan Russell, was joking with me, he drove that ball to left field. This park typically plays big and the air was a little bit thick today. But he was kind of joking that he didn't have anything left in the tank.

Once he gets a couple days' rested up, feel good about where they're at, and the key is to get back to a normal schedule, because this schedule was a little crazy. This time of year it ain't gonna be comfortable or ideal, so you've got to adjust to it and I think the kids did a good job.

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