

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Tuesday, May 23, 2023

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Tennessee Volunteers Coach Tony Vitello Seth Halvorsen

Postgame Press Conference



Texas A&M 3, Tennessee 0

Q. With the rain delay I know it didn't affect your start, but how did you stay focused during the breaks?

SETH HALVORSEN: You're just in this hallway and chatting it up and getting some snacks, keeping your body ready and staying ready to go.

Q. Seth, when did you find out you were going to start and what was your mentality going in? I imagine it felt good to get back and start a game since you had done it previously in your career?

SETH HALVORSEN: It was good to get back into the game. I threw a bullpen after that third game with South Carolina, so I was getting prepared for that time on and I was ready to go. It was exciting to be back out there.

Q. How challenging was it to pitch when the rain started coming down, and what did you feel like you had working for you?

SETH HALVORSEN: Yeah, it was fine. Getting a new ball after it got wet was a good thing to do, so that was helpful. My slider was working pretty well, and just had some deep counts. But besides that, it was working pretty well.

Q. Tony, kind of a struggle in the box today. From your vantage point, what did you see from the guys and their at-bats?

TONY VITELLO: Certainly guys trying, some tough guy in the stands didn't think they were, but I can guarantee you our guys are trying; otherwise, they're not on the field this time around or this time of year.

We certainly had some struggles earlier in the year, but I

think we got some things sorted out to where we found out what our best defense was, corrected some base-running mistakes. And then our at-bats on the whole, if you look at baseball, it's a game of percentages, have been pretty good. You take one day, anything can happen with the weather, with the starting pitcher, wind is blowing one way or the other.

There's a lot that can happen. So you've got to go out there and play, and I thought our guys did that. Things obviously tensed up a little bit as they took the lead first, and then we had a couple balls that didn't go maybe where we wanted them to. But I think the story is the guy that I saw walking up probably to talk to Burkey and those other guys. That was not in the scouting report.

Our plan A was to start Seth and let him go five innings, probably was what we were going to get, because they battled a little bit with two strikes. I don't know that he was going to get -- probably would have got to 100 pitches in the fifth at some point, so we would have taken him out in the middle of the inning and just went knee-jerk reaction, Sewell was already hot so we went to him.

But he could have given us more than he already did. But it didn't seem like we had much room for error. Seemed like one of those games where they were doing well on the defensive side, and offensively things tensed up a little bit when we didn't get to the guys as early as we thought we would.

We know he's got good stuff, but if you look at the prior history, our plan A, like we said, was Seth, Sewell and Russell. And if it wasn't for the rain, that's what happens. I don't know that anyone's plan A was Wansing going eight innings, except for one guy, Wansing. So kudos to him and anyone else that believes in themselves.

Q. Obviously weird circumstances can pop up like weather did today at any given game. What needs to happen over the next week, week and a half as you get into the regional to be more prepared and ready to go if something like this pops up again?

SETH HALVORSEN: Yeah, just know that we can battle

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together and battle back late in games. We've scored a lot in little outs before in the season, so I know we can do it, and then just big preparation here in the upcoming days.

Q. Seth, what do you think this team as a whole needs to do to have success in the upcoming regional?

SETH HALVORSEN: Yeah, just like I said, just battle together. We're all one team. It's not -- just get ahead on the pitching side and then get your pitch on the hitting side. Just keep it simple and fight for all 27 outs.

Q. Are there any positives to having this now week and a half off before starting regionals?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, I think in prior history, some teams have benefitted from that. I think Beam asked if he was available today, if that meant he wanted the ball after the rain delay, some things happened, but you can choose to push the metal to the pedal -- pedal to the metal I guess is the right way to say it. Brain is not working right now after that. Gas some guys out, maybe it costs you in a regional, or you can get some guys fresh and get them sorted and it could benefit you. A lot of it is probably how guys' mindsets are between now and then because you know their bodies are going to get rested.

I think playing in this league or playing in any league, a little bit of time off your feet or maybe not as many pitches thrown can probably benefit somebody this time of year.

Q. When there's that tensing up, offensively there's been maybe some of these games where there's been inconsistency. What is it like as a coach going toward the postseason knowing inconsistency can show up?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, I think frustration can show up, especially when you talk about the second half of the year many things start to get -- the stakes get a little higher or perceived pressure is out there. That means the frustration can mount quicker or it can escalate to a higher level.

You just started to see that with some guys, even prior to the game, swinging in the cage doesn't go the way they want. And you've got a lot of emotions involved, and I think you've got to be careful about letting those emotions take control of you. It's probably better to have passion, although I don't know in Webster's dictionary what the difference is between the two words.

But baseball is -- it's easy to coach, it's not easy to play, how you hold a baseball, firm but loose. It's kind of the same thing. It's a delicate balance of being in that box and competing but also being relaxed.

I don't know how our guys did it in South Carolina, but a quick turnaround, double-header, we faced one of the best pitchers -- I don't know if we had tense at-bats or not. Sometimes the other pitcher is pretty good, but they rallied and beat us in a heartbreaking loss, and our guys found a way to switch the dial pretty quick and have relaxed but competitive ABs in the next game.

Whatever that formula is, by now they know it, and when the game starts, we can't really play it for them, so it's up to them to have the discipline to put that in place instead of getting wrapped up in self-emotion when maybe you hit a line drive right at somebody and it gets caught or for whatever reason it doesn't go your way.

Q. You mentioned the word "tense" kind of in that dugout. Did you see that translate to when they did take to the batter's box? How do you combat that tenseness when you are kind of in these situations?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, again, once the script is finished, you can look back on it and pick things out. As the game is being played, if we see something crazy, a guy chucks a helmet all the way back in this tunnel, we'll grab him and talk to him.

But I kind of just start to see that it's not going well for us, and there's a different air in the dugout and in maybe a walk to the plate and in the box. You encourage one another.

Heck, it didn't happen today, but maybe even things spill over to where guys get fired up and you have words with somebody or a coach has words with a player. That can be healthy again because everybody is competing. And for this team in particular, I think the formula that works is kind of there. Putting it into play is another thing.

Like I said, I think it requires discipline, and like Seth mentioned, it requires everybody to just play for each other.

Q. What was your message to the guys immediately in that postgame huddle?

TONY VITELLO: You know, you want to get out of the other team's way. It's about as awkward as trying to say the right thing when you're shaking hands, whether you win or lose behind home plate.

We just want to get out of the next team's way and just talked about the schedule ahead. We'll let them know what's up. Obviously we're staying here this morning, and then we'll head back to Knoxville early in the morning. It'll be good for the guys to sleep in their own bed, and then

we'll come up with a plan.

I did just mention kind of the one thing. Usually there's a theme set for the day, early in the day, and to me it was, like I said, there's a little extra stress in the air. And I don't think it was guys, "This is the playoffs" or "This is the tournament" or anything like that. Maybe just a couple individuals, and then you've got a guy who goes out there and throws it really well, and it kind of expands from there.

Q. You hit Blake Burke lead off Game 3 in South Carolina and dropped him into the 7 hole today. Are you just trying to spark him, and have you seen any indication the last couple games that maybe he will spark and catch fire here?

TONY VITELLO: You know, the lead off at-bat went well at South Carolina just because he battled with two strikes and he's battling today, too. He hits one into the ground, and maybe because the ground is wet it sticks right there. I don't know how it went down.

But to me at this point it's all about he starts in a really tall position. It all is about whether he's going to get into his legs or not. If not he's going to look like the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which is not a bad place to vacation but not a good approach swing-wise.

We went with that strategy for kind of a long list of reasons that day, but for today, Maui got hit and then hit Wansing in his two at-bats, but we saw a different version of that guy today.

Q. Obviously you were not at Mississippi State two years ago or almost last year when they were able to take some of that time off and do something big with it. Why do you think guys have been able to do that? Because I would think on the surface with baseball and the rhythms of the sport, if you take guys out of rhythm, I would think that would make coaches anxious. Why do you think guys have been able to succeed?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, and hats off to those guys that are national champions from those two teams, but there's a lot of SEC teams I think that have benefitted from going home from here, and everybody is here competing to win.

But it's kind of a good segue on accident. We'll talk about delicate balance early. In my opinion I think the league prepares you for every -- there's nothing you have not seen. No fan is going to make a comment, no amount of fans, no noise, no facility, no pitching, no hitter. You're going to see everything in this league, so it prepares you. I think that's one of the reasons you often see a bunch of

teams from our league in Omaha.

But the league in doing that or in preparing you also beats you up a little bit. So to recover and kind of get some rest time between the finish of SEC play including here in Hoover and then getting back after it, I think helps people a lot.

To me, those two teams probably had a little bit of their own thing going, but I know it's worked for other teams, as well, and I think it's that combination of preparation and yet rest, as well.

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