

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Wednesday, May 24, 2023

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Florida Gators

Coach Kevin O'Sullivan

BT Riopelle

Josh Rivera

Postgame Press Conference



Florida 7, Alabama 6

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Well, what a great game that was to be a part of. It's a shame somebody had to be on the losing end of it because it was a really, really well-played game.

We opened up the SEC slate with Alabama, and they're certainly a totally different team now than they were when we played them before. Their pitching was outstanding tonight. It was just a really, really well-played game.

Give our guys credit. They hung in there and swung the bats well obviously in the 11th. Really proud of our team to battle and stay in it.

But just goes to show you how difficult this league is. You just look at it, and Alabama certainly is a team when you look across the field, a team that you could see hosting a regional. That's just my honest opinion.

Q. BT, just to be able to end it that way, your last SEC tournament, what does this moment mean to you to be able to kind of get that momentum to start the tournament?

BT RIOPELLE: Well, it means the world to me, but it definitely means the world to our team. That was an ultimate team win. You look at the last inning, we've talked about before how your best players have to play the best to win.

And much like Sully said, Alabama is a very old team. I think they start one guy in the lineup that's a freshman, the rest of them are juniors or above, so that's a hard team to win.

But our best players in the last inning came up when it means the most, and ultimately it's a great win for our team, not just me individually.

Q. You guys took quite the punch there in the 11th to go down three runs. What's the message in the dugout when you're down 6-3 and you look at the scoreboard and you've got three outs to go?

JOSH RIVERA: Basically just have good at-bats. We've been down before a lot in the season, and we've made a lot of comebacks. We just reiterated how important it was to stay together as a team and take it one at-bat at a time, one pitch at a time and just don't really worry about ending the game all in one swing.

I know that's what happened tonight, but prior to that we were just focusing on getting guys on base, and fortunately enough for us, BT took advantage of a pitch he could drive out of the ballpark, so it was huge.

BT RIOPELLE: To piggyback on that, Neely has been nails for us all year. He got put in a tough situation that inning, first and third, no outs. We kind of get lucky with a little throw in the line, the runner was in the line. Just bases loaded and had to make a pitch over the plate.

And Seidl being a fifth- or sixth-year guy, he's 25 years old, guys like that are going to come up in big moments. And Neely, like I said, has been nails for us this year. It was just good that we could get the win for him because it was about our time to help him out a little bit.

Q. Josh, walk me through your first at-bat, the home run you were looking for, and what did you see and what did you hit?

JOSH RIVERA: Definitely just trying to get on base any way possible. It was kind of hard to see. We had a little shadow issue there in the first inning and then little -- the sun was out towards center field, so it had a little light background, so it was kind of like seeing a shadow.

But fortunate enough for me I was able to see the spin on



the ball. I saw a couple 12, 6 breakers and a couple sliders, and right before I hit the home run I knew I had a fastball.

So I was kind of just expecting off-speed because that guy in his most recent games, whenever he had to make a pitch, he heavily relied on a slider.

I definitely just tried to put the ball in play, and I saw the spin out of his hand and just hung right over the heart of the plate. And I tried to put a good swing on it, and fortunately enough for me, it did.

Q. You've won a national championship. You've coached in seven of them, College World Series, that is. Where does this rank in games you've coached in your career?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: I'm not going to lie, this one was exciting. You very rarely come back from a three-run deficit in the 11th and have the ability to bounce back from a tough top of the 11th.

Obviously all the momentum was in their dugout. But there's a lot of positives in this game. We wanted to keep Hurston to about 85 pitches. I think he threw 87 because he was on short rest. Ryan Slater continues to do exactly what we ask him to do. Philip Abner came in and did his job.

And we extended Neely. Having the ability to do that, he's probably -- he obviously won't be available the next two days, three days, probably, but we did extend him in case we need to in the postseason.

We've had a resilient group the entire year, and this is just another example, but certainly it was an exciting win.

Q. At any point are you sitting there thinking about taking Brandon out, or he got maybe to that 25, 30 pitch threshold where he wouldn't be available tomorrow anyway?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: No, no, I felt like the way it played out, we did want to extend him, so we could pull some positives out of that. But at that point, once he got past 30, 35 pitches, it was like we'll just roll with him at that point.

Q. You touched on the resilience this team has shown throughout the season. To have another moment where you secure a comeback victory, what does that show about this group, and how much confidence does that give you as you get deeper into the postseason here that you guys are kind of in every game that you're playing?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: It gives you belief that no matter what the score is that you've got a chance to get yourself back into it. I talked to Chuck before the top of the 11th, normally we would take a strike and try to work our way into getting the tying run to the plate, I felt like, and Chuck did, too, that worst-case scenario that we'd get some momentum and put some good at-bats together, and if we did lose the game, at least we can carry some momentum into tomorrow.

And Wyatt at had a great at-bat, started off with two strikes, and Jack did a great job. And obviously their closer came in, and he's got an electric arm. And it was left on left, and BT put a good swing on a pitch. Josh had a great at-bat. Everybody had really good at-bats, and really the game, it turned on like seven, eight pitches. It's just one of those games.

But you have to have those experiences throughout the season to believe that you can do it. It's one thing as a coaching staff to sit there and say, we can do this, we can get back in this thing, but when you do it numerous times throughout the year, the belief becomes real, and that's what happened tonight.

Q. Just some baseball fundamental things, you seemed frustrated with the bunting and then there was a play at third, guy getting thrown out. What can you do to clean those things up moving on the rest of the week?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: There wasn't that many frustrating things throughout the game to be honest with you. Obviously the bunts -- the thing that we're trying to help is young players always determine their at-bat if they get a hit or not. But there's ways to contribute to the offense, whether it be a lead-off walk or having a five- or six-pitch at-bat to extend a pitcher's pitch count, a drag, a sack, a hit-and-run. There's so many other things you can do.

We're going to be put in those situations moving forward, and we're going to have to execute. All you can do is continue to work every day and try to improve. That's really the best answer I can give you.

Q. BT mentioned that Tommy is an older player for them, and BT is older for you guys, as well. What does that experience do for guys like Tommy and BT in those key situations in the 11th? How big is that to have a player like that that comes up to the plate?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Well, yeah, they've been in those situations before, so they kind of -- their heart rate slows down, they've been through the ups and downs, they've

been through situations very similar to that throughout their careers. You can see sometimes really good players, even though they're really talented, in those situations they kind of get sped up.

But when you have that many college at-bats underneath your belt, it just allows you to many times have success because you've been there and done that. Yeah, and Tommy, he's a great player for them. This put -- you have a potential walk and you get to an offensive count, and he put a really good swing on the ball.

But to come off the field and you're down three, and we've had multiple opportunities to do different things throughout the game to win it before that top of the 11th, to come back and have the grit to put some really good swings on two really good pitchers -- first reliever that came in for them, he was spinning the ball and locating it, and he can get to the back foot of left-handed hitters, and obviously their closer has got one of the best arms in our league, and he's going to be tough to deal with for the next couple years, that's for sure.

Q. You mentioned that this Alabama team was a lot different than the team you saw at the start of SEC play. What do you think you learned from this Crimson Tide team tonight?

KEVIN O'SULLIVAN: Yeah, I always felt like their team offensively was good because they're older and experienced, but I've been really impressed with their pitching. Obviously their starter was not in the rotation when we played them. He was a midweek starter. He's going to be good, too, and the guy they brought in behind him has been hurt for part of the year, and now they've got him back. Their pitching yesterday was really good.

They don't give you much. They don't walk you. And they can throw multiple pitches for strikes. I think that's the part of their team that I think has come a long way, and like I said, they're going to be someone to reckon with in the postseason for sure.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports