

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Thursday, May 25, 2023

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Alabama Crimson Tide

Coach Jason Jackson

Drew Williamson

Garrett McMillan

Postgame Press Conference



Alabama 7, Auburn 4

JASON JACKSON: Nice to be up here. A little bit better feeling than last night. The guys did a great job of coming out today on kind of a quick turn around for both teams. We felt like coming into this game whoever could bring that energy early on and get out to an early lead was going to have an advantage. We knew we had G-Mac on the mound and he was going to give us a great start, and he certainly did that but we were able to get on the board early with Tommy's home run.

It's a credit to these guys after last night and you lose a heartbreaker and you go back to the hotel, and like I said in here in this press conference, it's okay to be pissed, it's okay to be ticked off, but don't bring it with you to the yard today, and you could tell this morning when we were in our pregame stuff, they were loose as could be and we were riding on the bus over here, and you could just feel it, they had kind of turned the page. We said, let's make sure we don't bring it to the yard with us today, and you could tell right away that they didn't.

Just a great effort all around. G-Mac, and then our main guys, man, our two, three and four hitters had six RBIs. When your dudes are dudes, usually good things happen.

Q. Maybe you think you clinched it earlier, but after two wins here do you think you deserve to host a regional, and after missing the regional completely last year, what would it mean to be able to host this year?

GARRETT McMILLAN: We're not really focused on if we're going to host or not, we're just happy that we're probably going to be in. Last year wasn't fun not seeing our name on selection day. We're just happy to be where

we're at and just keep playing every day, one day at a time and one game at a time.

Q. Garrett, every day someone is putting together a quality start. What's the vibe in the dugout when you're talking and sharing notes in between starts?

GARRETT McMILLAN: Yeah, for sure. It's kind of turned into like competition. The pitching staff is definitely competitive.

He could tell you himself, it's a competition between us individually and with the pitching staff, every time we go out there, we're trying to put up better numbers than the other guy. It works out that way because we have a good defense behind us; if you can just pitch in the zone, get ground balls, get foul balls, it works out well for us.

Q. Drew, Tommy is tearing the cover off the ball. When he's slugging the way he is right now, how much more dynamic does this lineup get for you guys?

DREW WILLIAMSON: Absolutely. It helps to have somebody with that kind of pop in your lineup every day. That guy brings in so many other ways than just hitting, too. He's like the captain of the team; he's a great leader.

Nothing is going to hold him back or hold him down. He's just a great guy overall, so it's great to have somebody like that in your lineup.

Q. Garrett and Drew, I asked Butch, the coach of Auburn, about the job that your coach has done. What can you guys say since he took over as interim and what can you say about your coach --

GARRETT McMILLAN: Yep, he's done a great job. We all believe in him. Everything we do, he's told us to play for ourselves and just give everything we have for us and for this team.

We've all been together a good while now, just being here for so long, and just wanting to win for ourselves and just the state of Alabama. Just representing the right way; that's basically the way we're going about it right now.



Q. Drew, 40 wins for Alabama for the first time since 2010. You're one of the old guys around here that you came in and you saw some kind of down years, and what does mean to you in your fifth year to reach that accomplishment?

DREW WILLIAMSON: I'll tell you, it feels a lot better than how we started out. It's a lot of fun. You just trust the process and you grow in the game, and this team has just kind of been able to grow together and develop such a tight bond. To finally see it, to see the results on the field has been nice for sure.

Q. Garrett, three wins in your last three starts. Are you starting to feel back to your old self after battling injury earlier?

GARRETT McMILLAN: For sure, yeah. It definitely took a little bit to get my feet under me right when I got back, but ever since probably the first game I've started, I've been feeling pretty good and just attacking the strike zone is the main thing.

Like I said, the defense behind us is unreal. You just attack the strike zone, get pop-up, ground ball, it's usually out every time you do that, and then mix a strikeout here and there, and that works out well.

Q. Obviously I know beating Auburn is always a goal, but after last night, how that one ended and just being in the SEC tournament, is this one a little sweeter?

DREW WILLIAMSON: I think it's just a true testament to the mentality of this team and the maturity of the team to have such a gut-wrenching loss like that and have a quick turnaround and come out and play some of your best baseball. I think that shows the kind of team we are.

GARRETT McMILLAN: But yes, we love to beat Auburn.

Q. As you guys went through what you went through a couple weeks ago with the coaching change, all the veteran leadership already on this team, what was the discussion like in the locker room just among players about how we're going to get through this?

GARRETT McMILLAN: Just holding each other accountable. You just rely on each other and just come every day just trying to work harder than the next guy to your left or right. That's really the main thing. We just stay focused. We have a good team and we know that. We just stay focused, stay grounded and then good things will happen hopefully.

Q. Garrett, Jason mentioned a couple days ago that even during rain delays, which is common down here, you guys have been competitive and playing some mini games. What are some ways that the kind of friendly competitiveness manifests itself among the staff?

GARRETT McMILLAN: Oh, man. We'll do anything from playing flips to going fishing to doing anything, literally anything, cornhole. We compete every time we show up to the field regardless of what it is, I'm telling you. The shuttle, anything, at the hotel, it's always wrestling, something like that. It's always -- I'm telling you, it gets intense from the pitching staff.

Q. Garrett, you've mentioned several times that it was kind of a dream for you as a kid to play for Alabama. You obviously played at Sheldon State, you make your way over here and get the ball in a do-or-die game against your arch-rival. You throw six innings, get the win. What was the moment like for you today?

GARRETT McMILLAN: It was awesome. It was definitely a moment I'll remember for a while. This is one of the best environments to pitch in definitely throughout anywhere. All the fans here, there was a bunch of people here because it was Alabama-Auburn, local. You couldn't ask for anything better than just to go out there and do your best, and I guess it worked out at the end.

Q. Jason, Tommy left the game after going 3 for 3. What is his status and what is his status moving forward?

JASON JACKSON: We don't think it's anything too serious. He was having some soreness. It's more of a lower body deal. But we don't think it's anything too serious, but we thought as a precaution wanted to get him out of there.

Q. They said the last three outs are always the toughest of the game. That situation, you had to go through the heart of the Auburn order. When you make a pitching change, what's your message to the guys when you have that huddle out in the middle just to finish it off after last night?

JASON JACKSON: Yeah, I think you're playing some really good baseball teams, right, and last night we had to go through the meat of Florida's order and those guys had some great at-bats and we weren't able to close it out. Auburn has got a great middle of the order, too, and Riley gave us a great effort, but we just felt like it was probably time kind of from a matchup standpoint we wanted to make that move.

I just told Hunter your job is to get the next two guys. That's it, just get the next two guys out, and he did a good job of kind of settling in and doing that. Keeping it simple.

Q. Coach Thompson made the observation that he felt like your pitching staff has really upped their level of play over the last several weeks. To what would you attribute how that group has ascended in the month of May?

JASON JACKSON: Yeah, I think the back half of league play they've done a really good job. Garrett McMillan, Jacob McNairy, those guys have done a really good job kind of stabilizing after Ben Hess and Grayson Hitt went down.

I think one thing that's different -- not different, but one thing that's really done a good job is Mac Guscette. Mac has done a great job and he's got a great rapport with those guys. He calls the bulk of the pitches, and he does a really good job with those guys.

I think that's been a big piece for us is Mac doing a great job, and Dom does a great job, too, but you've got some older guys, and Garrett McMillan, Jacob McNairy just being those older veteran guys, they've really stepped up and had a really nice second half for us.

But also another big piece is just our bullpen has really solidified. We've had some guys kind of step up out of the pen. We've got a little bit more defined roles than probably we did -- I'm sorry, early on in league play. I think the back half of league play, some of those more defined bullpen roles, you've seen that's been a big piece of it, too.

Q. This rivalry is no secret, obviously. There's a lot of respect, but then Garrett said, we like beating them. How does it feel to beat them in the SEC tournament, and what's your confidence level that this team can make a run now that teams are going home and win this thing?

JASON JACKSON: Yeah, anytime you play your in-state rival, it's going to give you extra juice. Ton of respect for those guys. They have a great ballclub they've been playing -- we've had a really good back half and they've had just as good of a back half they've been playing really well, too.

You knew it was going to be a good ballgame today, but yeah, definitely always a little extra juice when you're playing your rival for sure.

We're just trying to go one game at a time. Our message

today was let's go 1-0 today. And we'll kind of have the same message tomorrow, one game at a time.

Q. Do you think this team has done enough to host?

JASON JACKSON: Yes.

Q. After missing last year and then everything that happened this year, what would it mean to bring a regional back to Tuscaloosa for the first time since 2006?

JASON JACKSON: Yeah, I think it would mean a lot. It would mean a lot to our fan base, it would mean a lot to our athletic department, but it would also mean a lot to our players, all of our staff and all the people that have put a lot of time and effort into kind of getting this thing where it is.

Our facility is built to host. I think our fan base is hungry for it. So I think it would mean a lot to a lot of people. We're excited about that opportunity if we get it.

Q. What does it mean to you that in the time since you've taken over the pitching staff some of the players you may have had a closer relationship with, they've been the ones to lead this charge and kind of put it in day in and day out?

JASON JACKSON: Well, I don't think it's just the pitchers. I think there's a lot of guys that have been kind of leading the charge. I know Garrett mentioned it and I mentioned it a few times, but guys like Tommy Seidl, Jim Jarvis, those guys have been leaders. Drew kind of talked about Tommy kind of being our captain. So yeah, for sure.

But, I mean, just having some comfort level with some guys that have been here and kind of been through it, and we played in a regional two years ago, came up short last year, so you've got some guys that are hungry, but we have some guys that have been around the block, and we have a lot of history together, so they kind of -- that kind of made it easier because they know our routines and they know the things that we do. So it's a little bit easier to let those guys sort of do their thing.

Q. Is this the plan to go with McNairy tomorrow?

JASON JACKSON: Yes, as of right now the plan is to go with McNairy tomorrow.

Q. It seems like veteran leadership is a core theme of the team. How gratifying or satisfying is it for you to see this team go on this run and play themselves into a position where they're probably going to be a national seed?



JASON JACKSON: I mean, I'm so proud of them. These guys really deserve it, and they've really earned it. They've played really good baseball all year, and so to kind of see that back half of league play things kind of come together for them, so proud of them. These guys, they just really deserve it, and they've earned it. They've earned every bit of it.

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