

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Thursday, May 25, 2023

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Auburn Tigers

Coach Butch Thompson

Bryson Ware

Postgame Press Conference



Hopefully we get that opportunity, and I'll be really happy if we get to go back there, but if not, we're going to compete our butts off and do what we can wherever we play.

Q. After last year getting a good bit of time off between getting bounced from the SEC tournament, heading into the NCAA tournament, getting a couple days, how valuable is that as far as heading into the national tournament?

BRYSON WARE: Yeah, it's huge. Just to get as much rest as we possibly can. Obviously you want to go as far as you can in the SEC tournament and win the championship here, but it's good to get our pitchers off their feet, position players off their feet and get a little bit of rest and get our minds right and put all our focus towards whoever we line up against in the regional and so forth.

It's really -- you really want to go as far as you can in the SEC tournament, but if you're put out, it's not a terrible thing because you get as much rest as you possibly can moving forward to the ultimate goal is Omaha, which is the top goal.

Q. Bryson, did you feel like the team was a little bit weary, a little bit worn out coming into this tournament after the run you made in the season there?

BRYSON WARE: Yeah, we didn't get much sleep last night, so I don't want to make any excuses or anything. Alabama came out and competed their butts off and they won it fair and square. That's on us if we let that get to us.

We need to be tougher, which is one thing we've prided ourselves on a team this whole year is we're going to be the toughest team out there, and today we weren't. We weren't there mentally, weren't there physically, and we've just got to be better.

We can learn from that moving forward, and we'll probably face things like that again if we make a run.

It sucks, but it prepares us for the ultimate goal.

Q. (Indiscernible) before the game, what all did he say

Alabama 7, Auburn 4

BUTCH THOMPSON: Congratulations to Alabama. Proud of this guy right here. The conference and all the teams and this community just put on another great tournament. It's nice to see year after year and after two decades in this league how this tournament has continued to grow. It's one of the best tournaments with the most talent ever in college athletics.

Q. Just to reach the program record outright, 24 home runs, how does that feel?

BRYSON WARE: It's awesome. It's really cool to do it at this stage in the SEC tournament with a good crowd in the stands against Alabama, it makes it a little sweeter, but it's cool to have Hunter on the other side, the previous record holder, and I just couldn't be more thankful.

And I'm blessed for the opportunity and ready to hopefully get a little bit more and help my team out and do what we can do in the regionals and hopefully super regionals, Omaha, wherever it takes us, but really excited.

Q. Bryson, how important would it be to you guys to host, and what would that mean to you?

BRYSON WARE: Yeah, it would be huge. Being a part of it last year, hosted a regional, and our fans came out, and it was a really fun atmosphere. Really cool to be a part of.

It definitely had a huge part to play in what we were able to do last year. Hopefully we can get that opportunity again and bring a regional to Auburn, Alabama, and get those Auburn fans -- be able to play in front of them again. It would be really, really cool.

Hopefully I haven't played my last game in Plainsman Park.



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to you?

BRYSON WARE: Yeah, he just said congratulations, and it's really cool to be able to do that in front of him, and he said we'll see him in Omaha. That would be really cool to get the Auburn and Alabama fans in Omaha if we both get a chance to go play there. That's pretty much all he said, not too much.

Q. Bryson, you've already been asked about the home run thing, but all the good players that have played at Auburn, great players like Frank Thomas, Bo Jackson, Josh Donaldson, how does it feel to have your name involved in a single-season home run record?

BRYSON WARE: It's a really satisfying feeling. Some outstanding athletes have worn this jersey that I'm wearing right now, and to be on the top of that in the home run category, it's really cool to see some of that hard work that I've been putting in all season, during the season, whatever that may be, pay off a little bit.

I can't be more thankful for the opportunity from Coach to be able to line it up with my brothers and be able to reach that milestone. Thankful for the opportunity that the Lord gave me, and hopefully I can play for as long as I can and reach to where those guys have played in the Big Leagues and so forth.

It's a really cool feeling right now. We're just focused on the regional and what we can do in the postseason.

Q. Coach, you've seen Alabama before this season. Have you noticed anything different since Jason took over, and do you tip your cap to what he's done so far?

BUTCH THOMPSON: I told him I'm proud of him. He's been a good coach for a long period of time, and everybody respects J.J., and when he's got his opportunity, I think there's enough maturity there that he's handled himself with.

As a coach that's been in this league a long time, we absolutely respect people that handle themselves very well, and he's done an amazing job.

I haven't watched them as much in person, of course, since we've played them, but I just think their pitching staff has just been that good. I think overall, I just think the quality and the depth of being able to run nine innings or an entire series, I think he's done an amazing job with the pitching staff, and you'd probably imagine and guess that their leadership is pretty good, but J.J. has done a very steady job.

Q. Alabama took advantage of the opportunities, but you guys had some chances. Just the difference in maybe a couple of clutch hits today?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, I think we had the bases loaded and two outs and it just didn't happen, and the whole time with the two outs, everybody that didn't perform well off of seven hours of sleep, we pulled that out and tried to adjust as the game went on.

But I think at the end of the day when we scored two in the sixth and they come right back and scored two, I think that was the difference in the ballgame because I thought that was -- just felt like a climb the whole way.

McMillan was good, Whitley shoved the ball in the strike zone today which was a good bounce back from yesterday, but it just seemed uphill. When we made it 5-3 I thought that was a huge shutdown inning for us that we were not able to get.

We tried to crank it up, but there was too many times once a guy got on or something happened, I thought the shift today for us was -- the shifts were no good. We could have made a few more plays and didn't correct some of that until later. Some of those things are good and the coaches work hard to put that stuff together.

But there was some contact that we wanted along the way that led to some runs, and they had to earn it, and they did. I tip my hat back there.

But we wasn't able to close off innings. I thought Bauman come in, got contact that he wanted two or three times, and that allowed them to build up the lead, and then when they scored two in the bottom of the sixth, it made it tougher.

We brought Cannon in because we're in elimination game, held serve there and almost had a chance. We needed one or two more at-bats or pass it down a couple more to maybe get to something dramatic there in the ninth to extend the game.

I think at the end of the day you can play all these scenarios, but I thought the two-out hits didn't happen for us, and it did happen for them today. In a nutshell, I think that's what I see the most in today's game.

Q. Butch, after the Missouri win, you said you felt like you guys had enough accomplished to host before that. Do you still feel confident in that, and how important would that be for you guys to host?

BUTCH THOMPSON: I'm always confident, and yes, it would be great. Period.

Q. You touched on it, talking about the first four innings of Missouri and then yesterday's game against Vanderbilt. Did you feel like your team was a little tired, the stretch when they had, and playing after midnight for two nights in a row? Could this team use a little bit of a reset, maybe a trip to the lake this weekend?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, we're going to make something positive out of it. If you want to win a championship, the nine World Series that I've been a part of as an assistant, bag boy, whatever, grad assistant, everything, head coach, you just have to work through these hurdles. You have to -- you can't do tired. You can't do cold or you can't win the first month of the season.

There's some things that you can't do. Every time I've walked into Omaha you're not walking in full strength, and you see people go through an entire season. I guess the people that you hear that don't understand that just probably haven't ever been there.

But somehow you have to muster up whatever you've got at the end of the year and play your best and maybe not feel your best if you went on a journey of 60-plus ballgames.

At the end of the day, and the things that I'll hash out with these guys, we'll pick up the pieces and we will absolutely start sharpening again and get this team ready to play. But I will remind them because there's eight things that happened today that were from a mind standpoint, and this winds up being your best tool, especially in a tournament like this where you're matched athletically. This is the best amateur baseball on earth, and when you're matched athletically, this becomes the biggest thing that you possess.

That was off for us some today in some moments.

Again, like I said, if the two-out hits had changed one way or the other there, we would have been right in the ballgame. They had to bounce back from something last night, too, but I just think this is going to be our biggest tool if we have any intention of trying to make it to Omaha, three of the last four.

But we have to stay in the moment. I had a charge with this team that I wanted them to win the SEC tournament. It's okay to fail at things; it's just about getting put back together and go try for what's next.

What's really neat, at the end of the day what matters most, is there's still opportunity in baseball for this ballclub,

and that's what we'll focus on, turn our attention to, and start preparing for.

Q. Can you talk about what Bryson accomplished this year after breaking the home run record, with all these great players that have played at Auburn?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, Josh Etheredge come out and saw him last week. I thought that was the neatest thing in the world. He's one of those seven guys that's had 20-plus home runs. Hunter Marsh came over right before I walked up to see you guys. I recruited Hunter and coached him for a year. Think of world of him.

How those guys have received him, that's just two examples there of Bryson Ware -- I talked about he got to off to such a good start this year. I talked about the ability for him to stay in the fight. That's kind of where that came from.

Bryson Ware was a defensive replacement on last year's ballclub late. He's worked so hard, and the bottom line is just the ability to evaluate the strike zone. The strike zone got smaller. He was able to get off his best swing. He never quit on himself. It's just good for anybody to see in not just baseball but anything, is just hang in there.

He didn't run from his school. He didn't run from his coaching staff. He absolutely stayed in the fight. We put him at third base, gave him another chance to win something. Put some competition over there because we're not sure the at-bats could hold up, and for a young man, he's talented. So as talented as he is, to be able to put it together, redefine, get his strike zone smaller and absolutely run it all the way through this tournament with the season that he's had is one of the neatest things I've been a part of.

I'll forever hold him in the highest regard, and I think that's a good lesson for now when it's so easy to touch the reset button for somebody to hang in there like that, and he deserves everything coming his way.

Q. What do you feel like your pitching staff can take away from an SEC tournament where last night kind of the freebies and I think gave up 10, 14 hits, somewhere in that range today, but what do you think that can take away from this week?

BUTCH THOMPSON: Yeah, I think it's just freshen up. That was a pretty heck of a good run, 12 and 3 the second half. When you've got a chance to win every night, you have to understand that your pitching is probably being used more instead of less.

When you're getting your teeth kicked in, sometimes you're just saying "uncle" and you wind up throwing some other guys. Cannon looks like he got out of some stuff there late but it's not quite as crisp and sharp. No excuses, but if they got to a point to where I think nothing but a good reset is going to allow them, so we'll probably give them a couple of days, we'll come back.

We'll probably do some squad stuff, I guess Monday, is that what we start figuring things out and pointing toward what's next, and yes, we will go to Lake Martin because we've done it the last two World Series trips. So they've already got the ice cream boat and stuff like that showing up at the dock. We'll do that to show great care and try to reconnect and try to sharpen some baseball stuff and try and get their minds back right.

But I think just the freshness. I think the pitchers learned their lesson, and whatever showed up last night, I know they were still engaged in trying, but I think a good reset.

I think John Armstrong is coming back a little bit. We've been nursing him back and probably kept him in there, probably shouldn't have brought him out for that last inning. Those two runs wound up being crucial because of the swing of the bat by Bryson Ware. I think we can be better for it.

I think we've learned those tenets of what's so important and learned those lessons. But they've been working hard for us for quite a while now. I think just recycling them, and I think they'll be ready to go and put back together in pretty short order next week.

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