

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

LSU Tigers

Coach Jay Johnson

Gage Jump

Josh Pearson

Postgame Press Conference



LSU 9, Georgia 1

JAY JOHNSON: Very proud of our team. We're playing the best baseball we've played all year over the last 20 games. Playing as good as anybody in the country.

With the stakes of today's game, we controlled what we could control really well. Gage was phenomenal on the mound. We put this in play about three weeks ago that he would pitch this game if we put ourselves in the position we did, which was to be an NCAA Tournament team.

So he's been working hard and ready to roll and was good today against one of the best offenses in college baseball. Probably as anybody that they've seen all year. Big day out of Josh and the lineup, and another great zero in the error column.

Proud of how we played. Get back to the hotel, get to work on Kentucky, and great effort from the Tigers today.

Q. What was working so well for you?

GAGE JUMP: Getting ahead, and I think throwing the curveball. Lately it's just been kind of one off-speed pitch, but having both in my back pocket with the fastball really helped.

Q. Also knowing what was on the line, especially with the postseason, knowing you had three weeks to get ready and to be here but to dominate the way you did, how was it for you?

GAGE JUMP: Just having the opportunity to pitch this game in a must-win situation, it's kind of what you dream of and what you love to do. I was super excited even though

it was a 9:30 game. I didn't care. So I was super pumped.

Once we got two in the first, I was like, okay, just preserve this lead as long as I can, and then put up some more runs, and the defense helped me a lot. It was a really good win.

Q. Like Coach just mentioned, you had three weeks, you had this on your mind for a couple weeks. How did your preparation maybe change, or did it stay the same on that four-day rest and an early morning game, as well?

GAGE JUMP: The preparation is kind of the same. I think there's some things you have to change, listen to your body. But overall the bullpen was just cut a little shorter, and then the weight room stuff was kind of the same.

It's just how I was reacting to being on shorter rest. But the atmosphere was great, and I felt great, so it was pretty awesome.

Q. Josh, it seems like Hoover, it's magical for you. You just show up, especially in the postseason. Why do you play so well here?

JOSH PEARSON: I don't necessarily think it's specifically for Hoover. Just try to take everything one pitch at a time, and maybe I just -- batter's eye nice here or something like that.

Yeah, just try to take everything one pitch at a time and be where my feet are. So the situation where I'm at doesn't really change. Just same game.

Q. Gage, how did you feel physically by the end of your start?

GAGE JUMP: I thought I felt better as the game went on, to be honest. Yeah, I felt good.

Q. Josh, do you feel like that was one of the more complete performances you guys have strung together from the first inning all the way to the end?



JOSH PEARSON: Yeah, definitely. I feel like everybody was slowing down with runners in scoring position, and we were getting the leadoff guy on and we were getting him over and getting him in, things we do every day at practice.

And we were really putting it together today, putting in good swings and not chasing outside of the zone and just swinging at pitches that we can crush. And we did a really good job of that today.

Q. Josh, that hit in the first inning, you've been really good with runners on base. I know we've talked about it, but is it a mindset you have or just the way you feel when there's guys there for you?

JOSH PEARSON: Yeah, just slowing down and putting the ball in play when there's one RBI to get, you try and get it. Runner at third base or bases loaded, just try to put a ball in the middle of the field.

Q. You said the 9:30 a.m. start didn't really faze you. What time did you get up this morning and get yourself -- how did you get yourself ready physically?

GAGE JUMP: Got up early. I don't know, I think 5:30 or something. Took a shower, and then I was kind of good. There was adrenaline early, so I felt like it was a night game, to be honest.

Q. If I'm not mistaken, I think Coach Yeskie came out and talked to you close to the end of your start when there was an out, a couple guys on. What was he saying to you in that conversation?

GAGE JUMP: Basically just this is your last guy, go get him, and kind of asked what I wanted to throw. So we went over some things, and then I told him I just wanted to blow a heater by him. I didn't want to walk him. I really didn't want to walk him. Yeah, I just tried to get it in, help the count a little bit, and I got it.

Q. Coach, do you feel like this was Gage's best performance?

JAY JOHNSON: I think he's been great for a while. I think just giving you all some context, he's one of the best high school pitchers I've ever seen. And recruited him hard to Arizona, and he chose UCLA, that was a gut punch because I believed he would be exactly what everybody saw today.

Then he only had 14 innings before he got hurt there as a freshman, and then coming in in the fall, he was difficult to deal with for our players, and I don't think he gave up a run in the non-conference schedule. One of those was a win

against Louisiana Lafayette, who I believe won the Sun Belt, and he just completely shut them down.

Then the start of SEC play, I think it was an adjustment. It was the first time maybe somebody had punched back as far as traffic, base runners, those types of things. I think once he got past Mississippi State and Arkansas start, I think he's been elite ever since. I think he's pitched like one of the best pitchers in the country. There's no doubt in my mind that he is.

Q. What were your expectations for you and Nate with Gage coming into the day in terms of how much you were willing to go with him, and at some point did you guys adjust that expectation upward given how he was cruising?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, it's a great question. I think I was kind of in the 90 to 100, but we were going to pay attention to how he looked, felt, all of those types of things. 9:30 game, a little bit odd, obviously, from what we do all year. He's pitched at night most of the season, obviously pitching on either Game 1 or Game 2.

But I was very intentful, kind of watching the first couple innings. It's a great offense. You can't make a mistake of leaving somebody in too long or pulling the wrong guy too early. After he gave up the run, the third and the fourth and the fifth went by like that.

I just felt like there was no chance we were going to send him back out, obviously, as he just said. I told Coach Yeskie to give him a breather, this is your last hitter, get convicted with what you're doing, and that's going to be it.

But what a performance. He'll have more time on the back end before the NCAA Tournament now, which is great.

Q. How do you prepare for a start that's three weeks ahead and going to be on short rest like that?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, I feel like this is -- I respect the question, but that's major leaguer. That's what he's going to do with his life is pitch on four days' rest. I just got out ahead of it of going, hey, we're moving you to the first game, and once we were playing well, won three series in a row, what we want to do is right in front of us.

So this game was probably going to be important. I don't think it should be relative to our resume and our season, but it probably is. That's the best offense in college basketball statistically, and there you go. He's why we're one of the best teams in the country right now. Everybody got to see that today.

I don't think it's as big a deal as we thought, and just we were monitoring it very closely. But his excitement level when I went to him with this a few weeks ago was like, oh, yeah, let's go. That plays a big part in it, too.

Q. Coach, what does it mean for the team to have a guy like Josh Pearson who maybe statistically hasn't had the greatest season but in the clutch in the biggest games he always comes through for you?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, so this stretch run that we're on and have won 15 out of 20, four out of the last five SEC series, if you go back and all these wins, walk-off hit against Auburn, big hit right there, huge bases-loaded double against No. 1 Texas A&M, and there was a couple last weekend against Ole Miss, he's just a quality at-bat machine.

I haven't quite figured out what's different in March versus May for this guy, but last year I just basically said, We're playing this guy. We have enough guys that can hit the ball over the fence on one of the best offenses in college baseball history. He's going to play great defense in the outfield, he's going to run the ball with runners on base, and I just trust him.

We kind of got to that point this year, too, and he just moves our offense. Might not be your prototypical SEC 4 hitter, but because he can do what he can with runners on base is why I have him placed in the lineup where I do right now.

Q. The players mentioned that this was a must-win game, and you said obviously on Sunday that you guys have basically punched your ticket already into the tournament. How do you approach this game in terms of importance for the NCAA Tournament?

JAY JOHNSON: Well, it was an unbelievable opportunity, as I saw it. I really believe we're one of the best teams in the country, we're just playing all the other ones. Of our ten-league series, eight of those teams are going to be in the NCAA Tournament along with us. Nobody else does that. I think that's our 19th win against the top 45 RPI teams in the country. I think that's less than five teams have that.

We're like 9-3 against teams 25 to 40, which is usually the bubble.

Logically my brain goes to we're in a good spot. Now, this was an opportunity to take RPI No. 5, national television audience, one of the best pitchers in the country that people don't know about because he's kind of just kind of emerged this year, and what a good win for our team for a

lot of reasons.

Q. Pitching obviously was the main theme in this ballgame, but the bats, especially Michael Braswell lead-off and Tommy White, what did you see from them?

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, I think we've been getting better, and I think improvement sometimes gets lost because it's a results game, and that's what captures everybody's attention.

We've been just getting better, and I think even guys like Tommy, who's one of the best guys with runners on base in the history of college baseball, they've just kind of understood what they need to do a little bit better, staying within themselves.

I thought we were great. We had bases loaded, one out and didn't get the guy in from third in the first inning, and I thought Michael scorched the other one that he hit into a double play. It's hard for me to be upset about that.

Other than that, guys hitting the ball the other way, middle of the field, spitting on pitches that the pitcher wanted them to swing at.

I thought it was a very good example of professional hitting today by our team.

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