

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Tuesday, May 21, 2024

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Alabama Crimson Tide

Coach Rob Vaughn

William Hamiter

Mac Guscette

Postgame Press Conference

South Carolina - 10, Alabama - 5

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, obviously a little bit shorter stay in Hoover than I think any of us wanted, but it was one of those days, man. I didn't think we gave anything away. I thought South Carolina took it today. They played good baseball. They drove the baseball. We had a great start. We're up 3-0. Feel like we're in a pretty good position.

We talk about it all the time as an offense, two-out hits win games, two-out RBIs are how you win games. And you looked up, and 6 of their 10 were with two outs. We just couldn't quite get off the field with two outs.

I thought we played great defense. And then obviously they went to Veach. And that's just -- man, that's an irregular pitch. It's a pitch that you try to take it and it's a strike, and then you try to move on it, and, man, it's 20 miles off a heater. Just a good pitch. He did a great job.

So obviously not thrilled with the result, but, man, South Carolina played good, and you got to tip our cap to 'em. And now we kind of sit and wait, see what happens. We'll go back and practice and keep preparing and hope we get a chance to keep playing baseball next week.

Q. Obviously you have a week until you find out your future, or just under a week, but then after that you have a few days. As player, what's your mindset knowing you could have a week and a half plus layoff before your next game? And obviously that next game is the biggest game of the year.

WILLIAM HAMITER: Well, I think we just want to prepare like any other day. We don't know what's going to happen. I hope that we're in, hope we can keep playing, but we're



just going to show up to practice every day and keep going, keep working, as if preparing to be in.

So hopefully that will be the case. But we're going to show up every day and keep working.

MAC GUSCETTE: Yeah, what he said. It's a weird time this time of the year. You never know what's going to happen in the post-season. We just got to take it day by day, figure out what happens on Monday, and then just grind at practice all week.

Q. For either of you. Veach, certainly a different look with that change-up. Could you discuss how you attack a guy who is going to throw at you like that?

WILLIAM HAMITER: Well, for me personally, when I was going up to bat, I was sitting on the change-up. I think the one I hit was a fastball, my first at-bat off of him, but I was -- that was his go-to pitch. So I was kind of preparing for it, sitting on it, me personally.

MAC GUSCETTE: Yeah, just got to be ready. It's a weird pitch. You don't see it every day. And I think you just got to calm yourself, kind of step back, take a breath and just go out there, and you know you're going to do well. And I think that's the best thing, just stay calm in those situations.

Q. First year under your head coach. What can you say about the job he's done at Alabama so far this year on the biggest stage at the SEC Tournament?

WILLIAM HAMITER: He's been awesome. He's awesome about instilling confidence in us as players. He does a great job of preparing us to go out there and play and win ball games.

He's mentioned this before, but I didn't know if I was going to come back or not this year, and I decided to, and it's been more than I could have hoped for thanks to Coach Vaughn.

MAC GUSCETTE: Yeah, Coach Vaughn and the whole coaching staff that came in are awesome. They get us prepared every day at practice, and that's all you can ask



for as a player. And I think that him and everyone that came with and J.J. that stayed has done a great job all year.

It's just time to wait and just figure out if we can do it one more time with the boys.

Q. You've extended your hitting streak to 10 games now. What's kind of working for you?

WILLIAM HAMITER: Well, I don't know how many more games of baseball have I left. I hope it's a bunch. I hope key can get in. But I've just been showing up every day with a positive attitude and just really, more than anything, just trying to have fun and enjoy it.

I don't know how many more games I have left, but I've just been trying to take it day by day and just be present, live in the moment and have fun.

Q. Obviously you guys will wait and see, you'll prepare as if you are in. Do you feel like you guys have done enough to kind of get in and be able to stake your claim in the tournament?

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, I mean, I'm probably against the advice of everybody else. I don't think there's really much of a question. But for me, I'm a big believer in not leaving my fate in anybody else's hands.

That's kind of how I approached everything in my life. I don't want my future, I don't want my career, I don't want anything dictated in the hands of somebody else. By not getting it done today, you do, you kind of leave it in somebody else's hands.

I think when you sit back and you look at the body of work of what these young people have done, there's no way you look up and say it's not one of the more -- one of the top -- last 64 teams deserving to continue to keep playing baseball.

We played -- this is my first time going through the SEC. The beauty of this league isn't just good players, isn't just good coaches, isn't just good environments; it is the meat grinder that is 10 straight weeks.

And you see other teams around the country that will go play SEC teams, and they're good. They're very good teams. They'll get them on a Tuesday or get 'em early in the year.

What makes this league what it is is the day in, day out. And like I said this in the interview yesterday, we played South Carolina about, I think, week three, week four,

something like that, of the season and took 2 of 3. That team is a different team than they were then. They played better today than they played at our place.

But I think when you look at the body of work with the series wins we have, the quality wins we have, the lack of bad losses that we have, I think there is -- it's a no-brainer that this is one of the top 64 teams in the country.

Now, again, there's a lot of people that have a lot of different opinions on that. So we'll see how it plays out. But there's really not a doubt in my mind these kids should get a chance to keep playing next week.

Q. Your first year, I asked the players, and seems like the whole baseball team feels that way about you. How do you feel year one has gone? I know it's not potentially over. But just your overview of something and you took over at a tough situation and have done a really good job.

ROB VAUGHN: I'm a believer in people. That's what drew me here, to be honest with you, is a guy like Greg Byrne. I think we have the best AD in the country. Just not that he's good at his job exclusively, but the human that he is. That's what drew me to Alabama in the first place.

Then fortunate enough to keep J.J. on our staff and to bring two guys with me that have been with me for a long time. Pap's been with me for 11 years; Mo's been with me for three.

I think that's the biggest takeaway. I get to show up to work every single day with people that believe the same thing I believe. And these kids, it's a special group of kids. The ones that decided to say, the Mac Guscette who could have signed, the Will Hamiter who could have hung it up, some of the freshmen coming in, Justin Lebron trusting us. That guy would have had no shortage of places to go if he wanted to. He could have signed in the draft, and he chose to say. Alton Davis. The list goes on and on. Gage Miller. It's a special group of kids.

I think when you walk into a new place, the temptation is like, well, I can't wait until I get my guys in here. And, man, it's just not how we've acted from day one. I've never believed in that. The second I accepted this job, those kids are my kids.

And, man, we've loved 'em hard, we've coached 'em hard. It's a group that hopefully I get the chance to coach at Alabama for a really long time. But I'll never forget this group of kids and how they bought into everything we've asked them to do. Done some really cool things. Done some really special things.

We have one position player returning from last year's team in Mac Guscette, and his team just finished seventh in the SEC. That tells you something about the character and makeup of these kids. So a group I'll never forget.

Q. Obviously you have a six-day layoff before you know your future, before you could even play again. As a coach, how do you handle a long layoff like that? Obviously you said it's been a meat grinder the last few weeks. But how do you handle that layoff to make sure they're ready come next week?

ROB VAUGHN: I think there's good and bad with that. Obviously this place is awesome. Like, yeah, we win today, it would have been great to kind of pad our resume or whatever you want to call it. But I just want to stay in Hoover a little bit longer. This place is sweet. This tournament, I waited a long time to get here, and you get the opportunity to play here, it's pretty awesome.

It's one of those things where we'll kind of rally back together with the coaching staff and just see where we're at. Try to get a feel for do these guys need a day to take a breath, do we need to get right back at it tomorrow.

I know Greg Farone threw a hundred pitches last Thursday and turned around and competed his tail off for us today. Just ran out of steam, which we knew was coming, but I thought he did a great job getting us out of the gate, which is what we wanted.

So to be able to let them catch their breath a little bit, let them breathe, but at the same time not taking days that you just throw away, that we can prepare, that we can get our guys where we need to be. And it can be good and bad. When you're super hot, you want to keep playing, keep playing, keep playing.

But at the same time, too, you're pulling after a 10-week grind of this, and then come out here, and you play an elite team like South Carolina, you're looking up and say, you know what, these guys can breathe for a couple days. We'll keep getting 'em ready, probably do some live-type stuff to keep the eyes working, to keep our pitchers kind of on track, and then wait and see where we heading on Monday.

Q. The SEC is kind of different this year. You have the teams at the top, and then you have five teams at 13-17, kind of all bunched together. Similar resumes. How do you feel the committee is going to view that? Are they going to reward the strength of schedule, or do you feel they will look at that conference record and have some concerns?

ROB VAUGHN: I think if they ask me I would be really happy to tell 'em take 'em all baby, let's go. This league's different. I didn't understand it until I got here. I really didn't. To be honest with you, that's going to be up for the committee to decide how they want to look at that.

I think that's what you're looking at, are you trying to make it super fair or are you trying to put the best ones in? That's not my decision.

I think we had opportunities to kind of put the final nail in there to leave no doubt of what's going on, and we came up a tick short doing that. So once you do that, it's out of your hands a little bit.

But I think when you look at this, I can't speak for other teams and other stuff, but Tennessee's lost one conference series all year, and it was to us. Arkansas, we got them at our place when they were the No. 1 team in the country.

But what makes this league awesome is you get Arkansas that week, and you take 2 of 3, and you're rewarded by getting the new No. 1 in Texas A&M the next week. There's not another league in the country that battles through that.

Now, what I will say is there's really good baseball across the country. Spent the last however many years in the Big Ten, some really good teams in the Big Ten. There's no doubt that there's some really good teams in the ACC this year.

So I think there's good baseball everywhere, but I think if you're looking at it, you do have some teams bunched together. But even within that five, I don't think they're all created equal.

So I think that will be up to the committee to decipher through that and see like, shoot, I think there -- there's 11 teams in this league that can win a regional. Now it's just a matter if we get the opportunity to hop into that and compete to do that.

Q. You talked about how this league is different. Can you expound on that and kind of compare to your experience in the Big Ten and then coming down here in your first season in the SEC and talk about that meat grinder a little bit more?

ROB VAUGHN: Shoot, I loved my time at Maryland. Man, I learned so much as a coach. Both my kids were born there. My wife and I made Annapolis, Maryland, home for a long time.

So I don't say any of this as a negative to other leagues, and never would I ever do that, but you have that slogan: It just means more. And for the last 11 years I've been on the other side it have getting really mad at when people would say that, and then you step into it and you get it a little bit. You get the crowds, you get the environment, you get the investment, you get the support. You get all of those things, and you do see it.

Like, it does mean more to people when you come down here to -- you have a lot, a ton of just college athletics communities. Been in Tuscaloosa for eight months now, and the one thing I found out really quickly is that place revolves around Alabama athletics. I can't go to the grocery store -- if we have a tough weekend, people are eyeing me at the grocery store; we have a good weekend, everybody is high-fiving you in the grocery store.

That's what you want. As a competitor playing in that, that's what you want. As a coach competing in that, that's what you want. You just want you want people to care.

And that's why I love it. People wear me out on Twitter all the time because we have the wrong color pants on or I pinch hit the wrong guy. But they care, man. And I'll deal with that. I love that. And I've absolutely loved getting to compete against the best of the best.

I think this group really laid the foundation of what we're building there in Tuscaloosa, and very fortunate to get to coach these kids, and very fortunate to call Tuscaloosa home.

Q. Cole Messina, after a big weekend that he had, for your pitchers and for the staff calling pitches, how tough is he to get when he's hitting the way he has this past week or so?

ROB VAUGHN: The hard thing with Cole, he's one of my favorite kids in the league. His demeanor is awesome. Like, he's a competitor. He does a great job behind the plate. But he's just a likeable kid. I didn't like him much today, obviously. But likeable kid.

The hard thing with a guy like Cole is the way you get him out is the same way that he does a lot of damage. Like you can get him on a good breaking ball, but if that breaking ball stays up, he's going to hammer it. And you saw that against Davis in the middle innings. We had first base open, and he's got two strikes, and it was kind of like, hey, bury everything. Nothing to hit, we're going to kind of pitch around him, for lack of a better term. And that's not a knock and Parker Noland, because that guy's really good left on left too, but you just kind of take your chance there. And if it's executed down, we might get a chance for him to

move on it.

But it wasn't. It hung up, and that guy blitzed it into right center. And that was the big gut punch. You got it back close, 7-5, feel pretty good. And then 6 of their 10 runs were all done with two outs. And kind of he put the final stamp on that with that good ball to right center.

So he's been in this league a long time. I watched that guy play from afar for a long time. But it's what's awesome. I say this all the time, in SEC baseball games I think we could start 'em all in the fifth inning in a one-run game and call it good. Because that's what it is, from the fifth on, who is going to make the mistake, who is going to get the big hit, who is going to make the defensive play, what is that going to be. I think it speaks to the parity of this league and, shoot, Cole's heck of a player. I hope we don't have to see him again until we get to Omaha, that's for sure. But good player, savvy player, and he was good. But that's what's tough. The way you get him out is -- you know it, you know how you can pitch to him, but if you make a mistake you better duck and cover, and he got us today.

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