

# Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Wednesday, May 22, 2024

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium



## LSU Tigers

## Coach Jay Johnson

## Luke Holman

## Jared Jones

### Postgame Press Conference

LSU 11, Kentucky 0

JAY JOHNSON: Great win for our team against one of the best teams in the country. I don't think anybody has been more consistent than Kentucky from the start of the year until the end of the year.

Our guys were ready to play. Winning starts and ends on the mound. Again, for the second day in a row, I believe we have one of the best pitchers in the country in Luke, and he continues to prove that over and over again.

I think tip your hat to Kentucky. I thought they tried to battle him hard and found another gear there to get to the fourth. We didn't help him, and then the fifth and the sixth were awesome, to finish the fifth and to go get the sixth, just complete execution there.

Great at-bat by Jared. I thought he really did a good job of slowing the game down. I thought he saw the ball well throughout the day. He hit a couple balls hard before that, really good at-bats, and was in control of himself, and stayed with that at-bat with two strikes.

And he's so strong. He's just got to be behind it a little bit. And with an aluminum bat, good things are going to happen.

Great performance by the team and really excited to play tomorrow afternoon.

**Q. Luke, it's pretty well known you guys have been one of the best offenses not only in the SEC but in all of college baseball this year, and you held them hitless through 6. What was going for you out there?**

LUKE HOLMAN: I'd say my ability to mix. I think I mixed really well today. Fastball was a little iffy sometimes. But I'd say I was able, even behind on hitters, I still stayed in the zone and was able to mix from behind and in front.

**Q. Luke, do you notice that middle column with the zero in it that has the H above it? Do you think about that while you're out there?**

LUKE HOLMAN: No. Not at all. Each inning is its own, each pitch is its own. Leave the statistics until the end of the game.

**Q. Jared, you'd been in kind of a mini slump head into that at-bat. Do you feel like you were slowly getting into it a little bit more heading into that at-bat, or did something click in that at-bat?**

JARED JONES: I don't know if anything clicked in that at-bat. Coach Johnson pulled me aside after my second at-bat when I struck out and just said, you know, get back to seeing the ball and being myself and being in character in the box.

And that's something I had kind of lost focus of over the last couple of games. Just going out there with a clear mind and just trying to get a pitch up in the zone and put a good swing on it.

JAY JOHNSON: I'd love to be in a slump and have 23 homers. That never happened to me.

**Q. Luke, just talk about your day. What was working for you? How were you from a stuff standpoint? And how does that compare to some of your outings where maybe it's been more uneven than it was today?**

LUKE HOLMAN: I'd say not giving up on hitters, getting behind, staying in, and able to, like I said, mix really well and behind in counts, spin the breaker here and there and finish guys off with fastballs, as well.

**Q. Jared, after your mini-slump you were talking about, how good did that ball feeling coming off your bat?**



JARED JONES: Felt good. I was just making sure it was fair. I hook a lot of balls to the pull side. So for me to actually truly backspin a ball was pretty good. Obviously that's a big spot for our team. To break that game open and give ourselves a chance to go out there and run with them in eight innings and save some pitching is huge. And we're looking to build off that for tomorrow.

**Q. Michael Braswell in the lead-off spot the past couple days, leads off the game with a home run today, three hits yesterday. How good has he been in this tournament so far?**

JARED JONES: Been huge for us to get the offense moving, get us starting off on the right foot. And when he gets ahold of one, he can still drive it out of the park. To be up 1-0 in the first inning, especially as the visitors team, kind of set the tone for the game. And he's been doing a great job on both sides of the ball for us, especially here lately.

**Q. Jared, they walked Tommy. What's going through your mind when you get up to bat?**

JARED JONES: Yeah, like I said, for most of that at-bat, I was just kind of thinking to myself, just get a pitch up. And then once I had two strikes, just like, okay, just get at least one run in, bases loaded, one out. So I hit a sacrifice fly. So I was really just trying to hunt elevation, and he hung a curveball.

I don't look into them walking Tommy too much. I understand it. He's the best hitter on our team and probably the best hitter in college baseball. Being able to hit behind him has been awesome all season, and just looking to keep doing that.

**Q. Luke, Coach said yesterday that Gage had been preparing for yesterday's start for about three weeks. Was that process the same with you? If so, how did that preparation look for you?**

LUKE HOLMAN: I'd say so. You've got to know how many days you get until you've got to get on the mound. So kind of was smart about the whole week, took some days differently and lifted differently. And I'm ready to get on the mound. It's game time.

**Q. Luke, how did you alter your preparation with just four days of rest? And how did you feel physically with not just the four days of rest but the 9:30 a.m. start and sort of the weirdness of this whole situation?**

LUKE HOLMAN: I'd say big mentally, it's stay mentally. I'd

say I'm mentally strong. So I was able to battle through that and go to sleep really early and get your body ready and just get mentally ready for it.

**Q. Coach, obviously Holman throwing a no-hitter; was the pitch count the reason you didn't trot him back out there?**

JAY JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, no shot he was going back out. He finished with 100. I was looking at like 80 to 95 was kind of my target, and then he got those two quick outs in the sixth against their best hitters.

It was a little bit wobbly. Like I was even considering going to get him in the fifth, which, if I'm going to let anybody ride it to the win, it's that guy. He's one of the best pitchers I've ever had.

He got through that after we made an error, and that's what he does. Then he got a quick inning the next inning, then he got a quick inning the next inning.

I can't speak to how good a pitcher I think Luke is enough.

**Q. I know in a baseball season there's a lot of ups and downs, and maybe the team wasn't performing up to the standards you had wanted at points this season, but patience and waiting on the team to be doing what it is now, did you always see it ending and the team performing the way it is now kind of at the end of the season?**

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, I believed in our team. I think last summer was critical. You look at just the last two days, I mean, we won the national championship on Monday night, and we had a celebration and all that, and Saturday I was with him in North Carolina. Then two days later I was in California with Gage, knowing what we needed to do to retool to have this type of team, and I believed with those two, we're going to be one of the best teams in the country.

Now, on the position player side, it took a lot of retooling. Again, I'll say it again, last year was one of the best offenses in modern college baseball history with a lot of guys that had a lot of at-bats under their belt. Tommy was really the only one that played wire to wire.

Then the schedule that we had, I mean, it's the real deal. That's win No. 20 against top-40 RPI teams. There's five, six, maybe seven teams in the country that have that. That didn't do us any favors as that group was trying to find its way in SEC play.

And so we pushed them hard, tried to get through that, and then it got to the point where we just like, hey, no matter

what happens, we're going to remain positive because I did believe in our team. The double-edged sword of the league is it's so good, you kind of always have a chance if you just stay with it. That's what these guys did, and we're playing better than anybody right now.

**Q. Just a little bit more on Luke, he talked about his ability to stay in the moment and not get too up, too down. How challenging is that for someone on a big stage? Obviously everyone knows what you needed to win games down the stretch, especially this week. Could you speak to his makeup?**

JAY JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, he's special. It's hard to think so positively about somebody you only have for one year, and I've been really fortunate, having obviously Paul last year and with Luke.

I think it goes a little deeper with him. I think there's always some unique circumstances that goes into it, and he was a cancer survivor when he was a little kid. So when you put in context a game you need to win in college baseball versus what he went through, overcame, it's not surprising.

But his poise, presence, mound demeanor, focus level, maturity is probably as good as anybody else I've had. Obviously he's the real deal. Like, he's going to pitch for a long time.

I love it, too, because there might be guys that have more in a fastball or metrics or this or that. There's nobody that I think is as effective at getting outs as him.

**Q. Coach, since you moved Braswell to the lead-off spot, the offense has really been clicking. What does he do that gets the offense off on the right foot?**

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, I think Michael has had a terrific year offensively for us. I'm really proud of him. We made a lot of adjustments when he transferred here, and he had a good fall.

It just took him some time, again, to work through some of those things. But I thought he was taking a bunch of quality at-bats, and I love the energy he plays with.

We brought him here basically because I just liked the way that he played. Like, that was the whole impetus of it. Sometimes you're looking at analytics and stats and those type of things. I just loved the way that he played.

The whole design is just get somebody on base in front of the big boys. Well, he's now got 500-plus college at-bats under his belt, so he's doing a great job of getting on base and he's hitting mistakes, and he's done a nice job with his

body. So he's hitting the ball with some authority, as we saw today, and just playing with a ton of confidence.

That's what you want out of a table-setter.

**Q. How big was it to see Jared get the grand slam today, especially because of his "slump"?**

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, it was important. As soon as they moved up on the wild pitch fastball, and even though it was a strike, it was like, okay, they're going to walk him. The thing I liked about that is in a bases-loaded situation, there's not a lot of margin for error missing outside the zone, and he punishes you when you're in the zone.

I thought his at-bats were good today. I thought they were really good. After the strike-out he went over there and just tried to get him reset and visualize some of the success that he had had earlier in the season. I thought he was under control.

You heard him talk about just trying to get something that was elevated and hit a sacrifice fly. That's a lot of maturity. Because if I had a body like that, I'd be swinging for the moon, which he's done sometimes. That hasn't gone over well with me. But really proud of him.

**Q. Was there always no question that Luke was going to pitch this game on four days of rest, and is part of the thinking of pitching both him and Gage on four days of rest is to give them extra rest for a potential regional?**

JAY JOHNSON: Yeah, we set the table on this at the same time, like this is what we're going to do. Part of it was an encouragement to the team, like, everything is still in front of us, and it was like, okay, now look at him and look at him. I'll take our chances against anybody with those two guys on the mound. Anybody.

I felt good, as I told all of you, about where we stood coming into this thing, and now there's no question about where we're at and what we're capable of, the quality of the team, the eye test, the performance. It's all there.

We went through a really tough stretch against some of the best teams in the country. That's really all this year has been was a little bit of a blip at the beginning of SEC play. But they dominated the non-conference schedule, they played great on the back of the SEC schedule, they're off to a great start in the postseason, and a lot of it has to do with those two guys setting the tone on the mound.

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