

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Wednesday, May 22, 2024

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Nick Mingione

Mitchell Daly

Postgame Press Conference



LSU 11, Kentucky 0

NICK MINGIONE: Good for us to get Travis Smith back out there. As you guys know, he hasn't thrown much, so that was important for us to get him an inning and then be able to sit and get back out there. Obviously he's a huge piece of what we're doing, but thought it was a close game until the seventh.

I thought the job that Robert Hogan did was awesome, got us nine big outs. Johnny Hummel came in, got us six. I think we retired 13 or 14 straight at one point.

Then give them a lot of credit. They came back, and we had a couple walks, and all of a sudden you mix in a home run, and there's the game.

Tip my cap to their starter. He did a great job, kept a really good offense off balance for a long period of time.

Q. Mitch, as a senior leader on this team, how do you spend the night getting the guys, rallying the guys to come back out tomorrow morning and perform better?

MITCHELL DALY: Yeah, same thing as always. They're a good team, and like Coach said, we were in the game the whole time, and we felt confident as a team that we were going to get that inning and get that swing to get us back in it.

But the same thing, preparation, is business as usual.

Q. Mitchell, what was Holman doing to make himself hard to hit today?

MITCHELL DALY: Yeah, anytime a pitcher can throw two or three pitches for a strike, it's probably going to give the offense some trouble.

Hats off to him. He did his thing, and like you said, he kept us off balance most of the game. And like I said, I felt like we were one inning, one pitch away from turning it around.

Q. Things got away from you in the seventh. But as we've talked about all season, your mantra is wins and losses expire at midnight. When you guys come out tomorrow morning, 9:30, does that kind of change or hammer that more at home?

NICK MINGIONE: No, that's the beauty of this team. That's why, in my opinion, one of the main reasons why we've been so successful this year. You know this; this league is an absolute grind. To go wire to wire, to lead the league and to win it, that is a real, real challenge.

And in my 18 years, it's the first time I've been a part of that. Been fortunate enough to win it three times, but never go wire to wire.

The only way you do that is, look, you can't ride the roller coaster. This team, this league, this sport, this life, whoo, man, if you allow it, you'd better hang on, and you better hang on tight. You'll be having them white knuckles you're hanging on so tight.

You've got to be able to move on. And this team has done that as good as any team I've ever coached. And I'm confident they'll do the same thing.

Q. What did you see from Trevor? What has he been going through? It's been three weeks since he's pitched, something like that.

NICK MINGIONE: You mean Travis?

Q. Yeah. Looked like his velocity was good.

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, to me that was the No. 1 indicator. As far as like the timing of his delivery, the command and all that stuff, that will come back. When you're throwing pitches with that much velo, was he up to 96, 97, with that kind of movement, the two-seamer, and then obviously his curveball, his cutter. To be able to



command all of that, that's a real challenge. So the rhythm, the timing of his delivery, all that, that will come.

But the fact that he had that stuff, as you know, whether we start him or we bring him out of the bullpen, that is a quality piece. When you look at our team and our bullpen, he's a huge piece.

I was just happy for him to get out there. As you know, for these guys, whenever they're dealing with some little nagging injuries or shoulders or lats or whatever, for them to have the peace of mind knowing, all right, my stuff is good, like I can get back out there, I thought that was a huge step for our team and definitely a huge positive going forward.

Q. What was Luke Holman doing that made things so difficult for you guys?

NICK MINGIONE: His fastball, he commanded it really well. He commanded it to his glove side, up to his glove side, threw balls away. Then the curveball behind it was really good.

The second he started landing that curveball for a strike and spotting his fastball, it became really difficult.

You can prepare for that as much as you want. And you look, I believe -- you can go back and check me on the stats -- the opponents' batting average against him is .178 going into the year. He just doesn't give up hits. The guy is extremely stingy.

And he can command the ball. He's intentionally throwing balls at times, and then he's throwing strikes. When you start doing that to lefties, righties, start changing eye levels, planes, and moving it around, you become really tough to hit.

Q. You kind of changed things up with the pitching today, like Johnny Hummel comes in in the fifth, and then Dom Niman makes his first relief appearance. What went into some of those pitching decisions, just mixing things up a bit?

NICK MINGIONE: Obviously Travis was not going to be able to go longer than one, maybe two innings. If we were to even get him through two, I think we would have been happy with that with the pitches and his pitch count.

So the second you do that, now all of a sudden that just changes everything. Because obviously we would love to have a starter go out there and roll. Wanted to give Dom a look out of the bullpen just in case. Obviously anytime you have a pitcher that's never thrown out of the bullpen for

you, obviously that was a huge piece, so we wanted to give Dom the opportunity to come out of there.

Obviously with Hogan, and we wanted to kind of extend him a little bit, too. We got him up to three innings. He got us nine outs. And I think that's really important for us moving forward to make sure that he's not just a one-inning guy, to be able to expand him.

I loved the way the game was going. I told our team this. I loved -- we needed to be in a 2-0 game. It's like with our offense, you guys know all the numbers, what we've done in league play, I really believe it's as good an offense, if not the best offense in our league. You look at the numbers offensively, it's really good.

So we don't have -- he haven't played one of those games in a while. But we had the game that we wanted. We had pieced it together exactly right. And then it got away from us, and give them credit. What did they hit, two grand slams? And they got the hits when they needed it, so tip your cap to them.

Q. I don't know how much time you had to prepare for LSU and obviously this is the first time you two have faced this season, what do you think has changed with them over the last 20-ish games after that slow start in conference play?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, I have insider information since I'm such good friends with Jay Johnson so I won't let the cat out of the bag, okay. I'll let you guys see if you can pull it out of him.

But I just think, look, you guys know this, but it's really hard to repeat. It's really hard to repeat. Look at what's happened to the two previous national champions. They didn't even make our conference tournament the last two years. It's just a real challenge.

Talking to one of the other coaches in the league, I thought he said it great. This league is like the greatest most intense tug-of-war -- okay, I'll do a prop. You guys want to use a prop?

It's like the greatest match of tug-of-war, and there's just heavyweights. Guys like flexing their muscles, and just like you're holding on, and it's like, man, here we go, and then you gain an inch and you're like, yeah, this is awesome. All right, gotta keep going, keep going, and you're fighting and you're going, and all of a sudden you get another inch, you're like, yeah, and then all of a sudden they pull it back and it's got two inches, and you're right back to where you were.

Then all of a sudden you have a couple things don't go your way, and then all of a sudden you find yourself on the other end going the wrong way. But it's so easy. The margin of victory is so small. It is so tiny.

It's why we don't get days off. It's why we just -- man, anytime we get a minute to just try to catch our breath, we're just trying to catch our breath and looking for a TO to regroup.

To do that over and over and over again is just really hard. It's just really hard. They lost a lot of pieces off that previous team. They had to figure out and get some guys in some new roles and move them around and some guys are just not there anymore, then all of a sudden, hey, look, you have a new pitching coach that comes in that's been with them, and there's just so many moving pieces that have to happen, and by the way, the whole time you're trying to figure stuff out, everybody else just keeps pulling really hard.

It's like -- so this is what I know. I will say this, and I believe this with all my heart. Jay Johnson is one of the best coaches in all of college baseball, and if there was somebody that was going to figure out, it was him, and sometimes it just takes longer. It just takes longer.

Is it easy? No. But I think we can all agree that when you look at their team, you look at their arms and you look at their positional players, they have plenty good enough players. They're clearly one of the best 64 teams in the country.

That was a really long answer to a short question. I hope it made sense.

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