

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Thursday, May 23, 2024

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Arkansas Razorbacks

Coach Dave Van Horn

Mason Molina

Peyton Holt

Postgame Press Conference

Kentucky - 9, Arkansas - 6

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the players.

DAVE VAN HORN: Yeah, just really got to give credit to Kentucky. They came out and they played a really good ball game. Obviously made all the plays defensively. Really a couple of really nice plays in the infield. When we made a mistake, they hit it out of the park for the most part.

We didn't play a clean game. The first inning we got behind early, threw a ball away and didn't catch a ball at second, and, you know, bang, we gave 'em two runs. They're tough to catch because when they get ahead of you, they can do some things.

But I was proud of our team for battling back. Got back in the ball game after Peyton's swing with two outs, drove in three. All of a sudden we're down two.

The inning that killed us was probably the bottom of the 7th. Kind of ran the momentum back over to them, and we found ourself back down five.

But it was really good to see Mason pitch well again. He threw well in relief, Game 2 against A&M, the game we needed to win to wrap up the West. And this is his first outing since, and he matched it again, threw really well.

So, we've been on the road about a week, obviously didn't like the way -- I didn't like the outcome, but we know that we have got a big week ahead of us, and we got to get ready for next weekend.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the players,



please.

Q. Mason, last two outings have gone well. Just kind of how do you feel about maybe a potential new role or getting back in the starting position?

MASON MOLINA: Yeah, I'm going to throw where I'm needed. That's up for them to decide, and I'm just going to go out there and pitch to the best of my ability wherever they want me.

So we haven't talked about it yet, but I'm just going to go out there and throw to the best of my abilities.

Q. What's been good for you these last two outings?

MASON MOLINA: I think my command has been much better I've just been filling up the zone with strikes with all four pitches, just being able to command my fastball, which is a huge part of how I pitch. So that, and the slider getting a little bit harder has really helped me go at hitters.

Q. Getting some offensive momentum going toward the postseason, you scored some runs here, what do you think about where you guys are offensively right now?

PEYTON HOLT: I think we're right where we need to be. Yeah, we didn't win both games -- either game, but we're swinging it well. We just got to get those timely hits, just stack clubs and stay with our approach.

Q. Mason, how much difference has there been from moving from starter to bullpen? Has it been much? What have you had to change maybe mentally or in preparation for coming out of the pen?

MASON MOLINA: I think it was a really good thing for me. It allowed me to reset and not overthink things. So that was something we were talking about over the last weeks, just, you know, I was overthinking things and I was trying to be too fine, and now I really don't have the luxury of thinking. It's just kind of get hot, go in the game and let your stuff work.



So I think if I end up starting at some point again, whether that's up to them or not, it would be -- I would try to transfer that over as much as I can.

Q. Talk about kind of putting this behind you, getting ready for the NCAA tournament, the regionals. Talk about the mindset going into the NCAA tournament and how guys can put the start in the SEC tournament behind you.

PEYTON HOLT: You're playing all year to get to Omaha, and this is where it starts. We've been preparing for this since August. And we're really not going to change much, we're going to do our work, be intentional and take it day by day.

MASON MOLINA: Well said.

Q. Your home runs, what pitches you hit? How do you feel, in a zone or something right now?

PEYTON HOLT: First, the first one was just a two-strike fastball in. They have been working me away soft, hard in all weekend. I finally just cheated it a little bit and caught it up front. And then the next one was just a slider he left over the middle of the plate. And with our approach with a guy like that, we're trying to stay hard through the middle, and I just kind of caught it up front.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll excuse the players and take questions for Coach.

Q. As I was asking them, offensive momentum, how do you feel about maybe where you are as a run-producing team right now?

DAVE VAN HORN: Yeah, it was a little bit up and down. We left a lot of runners on base in the last two days. Really the biggest hit we got was that three-run homer.

We got, you know, hit here or there or a sac fly yesterday. But today's game was, again -- in our big inning, we needed another hit.

We've got to get better. We got to get better. That's what I just told 'em, we got to get more production up and down the lineup. It's spotty right now.

I think guys are trying too hard, trying to do too much instead of just take what they give you sometimes. What I'm talking about is maybe a couple guys going out of the zone, put themselves in a bad count. We got to flip that, take the pitch, work for the next one.

Yeah, we're going to have to swing the bats a lot better

when we get to the regional.

Q. You used four or five guys who are potential postseason starters for you today. How do you think that maybe sets you up and do you have any difficult decisions to make about your starters next weekend?

DAVE VAN HORN: Like I said, I thought Molina threw really well the last two outings. I thought Tygart was really good for an inning. Had a hitter down 0-2 and just made a really big mistake and he unloaded on it.

Just little careless things like that, you know, ball's hit off the end of the bat, spinning like a top, you don't field it with one hand, you field it with two. You don't run away from it. Ball spun right out of his glove.

When you're older, you know that. Freshman, younger guy, I mean, it doesn't happen again down the road. But, you know, that inning couldn't happen right there. That was frustrating. Other than that, Tygart's first inning, man, he looked really good, breaking ball going, spotting his fastball down, had a little movement, a little sink.

And it was good to see McEntire just threw one hitter, but he threw pretty good. So Gage Wood, couple really good hitters, didn't get behind. When you get behind 2-0, second time they see and you got to throw a fastball in there, they jumped on him pretty good. When he was ahead in the count, not a problem.

So it's process every day. You got to get better, you got to learn from it, hopefully next time on the mound do a little better.

Q. What's the message to the team to kind of get 'em to refocus to get ready for the NCAA tournament?

DAVE VAN HORN: They will get back and rest up just a little bit. Message out there was, this is where we wanted to be as far as we know we're going to be in a regional, a really good opportunity to host. It's time to take a step forward. We kind of went backward a couple weeks ago, sideways. We've been up and down. We need to make a move and finish this thing up the right way.

Q. I want to ask you about how important or not important is the SEC tournament to get success and in the regionals and super regionals to even get to Omaha?

DAVE VAN HORN: Depends on where you are. Depends on your record at the time coming in here, you know, or depending upon how you're playing. If you're not playing very well, you come in here, play really good, you can gain

some momentum. Come in here, you got things locked up and you just don't want to get anybody hurt, you want to play, obviously, you want to win, you don't like losing, you are used to winning, that's why you're in this position that you're in.

Just depends on who you are and where you're at as far as wins and losses and how you're playing. And I wouldn't say that it's not important. It's more important for some teams than it is others, like everybody knows.

If you're asking me if we should have a tournament or not, I would say, yeah, we need to have a tournament.

Q. Overall thoughts on Hagen's start today, shortened start.

DAVE VAN HORN: Yeah, I think probably a little amped up, leaving some things up, fastball up. Just not real sharp. I think he got a little frustrated.

But that's about what we wanted him to throw right there, 35, 40 pitches, two to three innings, max. And we thought, hey, that's enough. So give him a little opportunity to have a couple days' rest more than normal leading into next weekend.

But, yeah, Hagen is Hagen. He's good. He'll be ready to go.

Q. Some uncharacteristic defensive plays in the first. You think maybe that was just early start? Or what went into that?

DAVE VAN HORN: No, you can't blame it on that. Hagen tried to quick pick and threw it wide. He's one of the best fielding pitchers I've ever had, and just threw him into scoring position there after a walk. Frustrated him a little bit.

Then the ball that was hit up the middle, he got jammed or hit it off the end, I think it was jammed, and Peyton pretty much lost it in the crowd. And I feel like it was looking for the double play instead of just going and catching the ball with one arm instead of two.

The ball ran from him a little bit, and, you know, who knows where it would have gone if we catch that ball as far as getting through that inning. But we didn't.

Had another pitcher error there late on that ball that was spinning. That ball started over here and jumped over there, and we're like, whoa, that thing's spinning hard. And he just nonchalant it with one hand, and it spun right out of his glove. A veteran is going to get down there and

smother that thing because know what's about to happen.

So, yeah, those are a couple three mistakes we normally don't make. And we make those in the next weekend, we'll be in trouble.

Q. Obviously the tournament format changes next year. Do you like the changes that are coming, all 16 teams single elimination?

DAVE VAN HORN: I don't know yet. I don't know. I mean, I don't know. Yeah, a bye is always good, but you got to win or go home, you know. It's a lot of travel if you don't win when you're in and out of here like that.

I don't know what else we can do. They have looked at everything, looked at having two tournaments, the winners play each other. I mean, then you got to have two sites and you got to have two of everything.

So, yeah, it will be interesting next year. So I didn't really answer your question, I'm sorry.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports