

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Friday, May 24, 2024

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Kentucky Wildcats

Coach Nick Mingione

Cameron O'Brien

Postgame Press Conference



South Carolina 6, Kentucky 5

NICK MINGIONE: Obviously not the result we wanted. I think Mason Moore is about three or four batters away from having a totally different result. Our inability to keep the ball in the yard obviously cost us.

I thought Cam threw the ball great. Ben Cleaver gave our offense a chance to come back, but some lack of execution on the offensive end and some baserunning things and all of a sudden you don't get the result you wanted.

Tip your cap to South Carolina, they're a great team, they played well, and they deserved the victory.

Q. Cam, you and Ben and Mason, I think eight walks, two hit by pitch today. Is that going to be something you guys focus on over the next week before tournament play starts?

CAMERON O'BRIEN: Yeah, definitely. We're looking to go out and execute quality pitches and we let a few too many get away from us today, and we're going to hone in on that before the postseason.

Q. Given the way you guys have played this year, the vibe of the team is still pretty good, understanding you still have bigger fish to Friday down the road even if you're out early here?

CAMERON O'BRIEN: Definitely. We didn't show up and do what we wanted to do here. We are very tight knit and a family, so we're with going to learn from this and move on and get ready to go for the regional.

Q. Cleaver hasn't pitched much this year, but he's pitched in a lot of big games. What does it say about a freshman that he's able to do what he's doing as a first

year pitcher who hasn't thrown a lot?

CAMERON O'BRIEN: Yeah, he's been working really hard. He got banged up a little bit at the beginning of the year, but he's been learning from a lot of us old guys, asking me a lot of questions. So I like to help him out every day, and it's awesome to go see him out there and do what he's supposed to do.

Q. Take it to the eighth, Nicholson gets on second and Nolan hit that long drive that doubled up. Is that just a play you throw your hands up in the air and go can't really do anything about that?

NICK MINGIONE: Well, a ball in the infield you're supposed to fall back and we didn't do that so we didn't execute that baserunning play and obviously it's a costly one. But give Nolan a lot of credit, he squared it up and he made a good play.

But in a perfect world, we would bolt back there and just stay out of the double play. But obviously we didn't do that, but what a clutch hit by Nicholson. I will say that.

Gave us a chance, man. Was right there. I thought that was a huge hit in the ballgame.

Q. Second time this year that South Carolina has hit Mason pretty well. Is that some almost of maybe a tough matchup for him or is that just baseball in your mind?

NICK MINGIONE: No, they've done a good job against him. The thing that Mason did today was he just walked and hit too many guys. They got their hits, yes. They got themselves in some really good counts. I thought that hurt Mason.

When Mason is at his best, he's ahead in the count. He was just behind in the count too much today. So give them credit. They did a good job with the strike zone. When you saw Devin go out there in the very first inning, what were we, a batter in, we were a batter or two pitches in, and like, no, come on, now. Like, come on now, Mason.



But he's pitched well for us all year. But you're right, they were able to get to him twice.

Q. Now you guys have a week before NCAA Tournament play starts. You're likely to be a top 8 seed. What are some things you think are going good for you heading into the NCAA Tournament and some things you think you need to work on throughout the next week?

NICK MINGIONE: One thing I'm looking forward to for the guys is to be able to get some rest. This has been a super long season, and you've seen how many road games we've played. We've had one flight -- no, we've had two flights. Every other one I feel like is a six-, eight-hour bus trip. I'm looking forward to them being able to spend some quality days in their own bed. That's always a good thing.

We've got to be able to get to the spot where we continue to have our pitchers just focus on their quality pitches, and we are on the attack. Our opponents feel that. Then offensively, we have to continue to do a good job with two strikes, and I think we can do better. I think this tournament we did not do as well as I would like. As a matter of fact, I don't think we met the standard maybe one time with two strikes.

We've got to get in there and do a little better job with two strikes. We've got to tighten up some of our baserunning, our base stealing, and all the little trick plays and gadgets. We've just got to tighten all that up because when we're doing that, that's us at our best.

Q. Parker Marlatt had some good success against you guys on the mound. What made him so effective, and how much detail in the scouting report did you have on that guy?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, we had quite a bit of information on him. But he threw great. He located his fastball, had some good execution there, and his breaking ball was really good. A lot of times when you see pitchers with that big of a breaking ball and that much depth, it's hard for them to land it for a strike, but give him credit, he did.

Q. Are you in a place now where you feel comfortable with Cleaver maybe being a guy you go to in a big spot in a regional at this point?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, Joe, coming out of our fall, we do a ton of player evaluations and things like that. I had him as our midweek starter. He was a guy that in my hopes, he would be our midweek starter.

And then much like we did with Travis a year ago when we

got to the regional, that would be our potential fourth starter, and because he hasn't been able to do that and we obviously -- their safety is number one to us, so we've brought him along really slowly. But I can tell you that from the second we've got the clearance from our trainers for him to be able to throw, we've thrown him every time. Every time.

He was a guy if you told me at the end of the fall, hey, look, by the time we get to this time right now, Coach, he'll be in your rotation, I would say, yep, I believe it. That's how highly we thought of him. In a lot of ways we feel like we're adding another quality arm to our bullpen. If we've got to start him, I'll feel totally comfortable doing that. But he's a super talented freshman.

Q. Any parting thoughts on the end of this format in this event, moving to 16 teams, single elimination next year? Are you going to miss this format?

NICK MINGIONE: I will not. I will not miss it.

As a matter of fact, I will say, I will go on record and say this. The format that we're doing is the one that I voted for, so for what that matters, I don't know. I will say this, and I've said this every year: Our conference does an amazing job with this tournament. When you just look up and down, the staff, the people, I was personally really happy that the 3 -- there was no rain up to this point, and it was a 3:00 game because all the people from the grounds crew to the office to you name it, they have spent a lot of time here, and a 9:30 game was early.

Just so thankful for the job that our league and all the folks that have worked at this tournament have done. It is as good as it gets, and there is none better.

But I will say this: The format that we're moving to, change is not something that bothers me. I just think that we have to be able to make changes and adapt, and I think there's a lot of times in life where we're just like, man, change can be really hard.

But I told our players, every first year of every first team meeting I tell them, if you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it. If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change the way you think about it.

I'm looking forward to it. Obviously there's no changing our format that we have now, so I'm looking forward to a new challenge and a new way to compete at the highest level against some of the best teams in America.

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