

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Friday, May 24, 2024

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium



South Carolina Gamecocks Coach Mark Kingston

Ethan Petry

Parker Marlatt

Postgame Press Conference

South Carolina 6, Kentucky 5

MARK KINGSTON: Well, coaches love when players kind of back up what they say in public, and I think I put it out there pretty consistent over the last few weeks about the resolve this team has, the heart this team has no matter what, and today was just more evidence of what they're made of, and so very happy for them, very proud of them.

Very happy for Dylan Eskew and Tyler Dean and Parker Marlatt and Matthew Becker. They just faced potentially the No. 1 overall seed in the NCAA Tournament and gave up two earned runs.

Couldn't be more happy for them, proud, and again, you don't need any more proof of the resolve of this team.

Q. Ethan, that ball in the eighth inning was on you pretty quick with the tying run on second. Take us through that play, please?

ETHAN PETRY: I just kind of reacted, and it came right to me. And I kind of got a little nervous, so I just flipped it over there.

Q. Underhanded?

ETHAN PETRY: Yeah. Shortstop style.

Q. Parker, you threw a career high in pitches today. How is the arm feeling, and what was working for you so well today in your opinion?

PARKER MARLATT: I feel good right now, but obviously tomorrow might be a different story. I haven't done that since probably early or late fall probably.

What was working for me today was my two priority pitches. I throw a big curveball, obviously you guys know that, with a big ride carry fastball. So when I have those two working for me, I'm pretty much unhittable.

Q. Obviously coming less than 24 hours after yesterday's loss, what does it say about this group to come back and find a way to win at any cost today?

ETHAN PETRY: We just know how to bounce back from anything. We're the most battle tested team in the country. Coach King said that already to us, and I'm sure he said it in a lot of interviews.

We just know how to bounce back. We got swept against Georgia at home, got swept against Tennessee, and if you saw us at practice the day before the tournament, you would be like, this team didn't get swept, they just won.

We're always prepared for battle.

Q. Parker, you had a tough outing the last time you went out there. Today you come in in a rough situation and get out of it and go deep. Can you take us through your mindset? You're just a freshman. What is going through your head? How have you let yourself come up big in these moments?

PARKER MARLATT: Mindset coming in today was no different than coming in against Tennessee. I just didn't have it that night. It's awesome knowing that Coach King and Coach Matt trust me big to go out there in a big situation and get a big out. Did the same thing today and kept on rolling.

Q. Ethan, nothing is official yet about Gavin, but if that was his last swing, what has he meant to the team this year, and how big of a hole is that for you guys, and how much more is on you being a first baseman now?

MARK KINGSTON: Let me answer that question before Ethan does because it's not official that it's a done deal. I know supposedly a hot mic caught that it was definitely something. The doctors, our official doctors still need to

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look at it. We could potentially have a Christian Walker situation, and all the Gamecock fans know what that means from early 20- -- I don't know if it was '10 or '11 when he went through that.

But we're not going to say that Gavin's season is over yet until we exhaust all things that might get him on the field. If it doesn't work, it doesn't work, but we're not going to be of the mindset yet that it's over. I don't know if you still want to have that question for Ethan.

ETHAN PETRY: Next guy up. We got Talmadge LeCroy ready to go, Will Tippet ready to go. Those guys are our guys, and they're going to be ready to play against LSU tomorrow night.

Q. Parker, going off Jordan's question, coming in there in a bases-loaded situation, get that first out. Take us through that at-bat, please.

PARKER MARLATT: I don't know if I threw two curveballs in a row or what, but that's a big out, so that kind of gave me momentum for the rest of the three and a third, I think. So yeah.

Q. Mark, when did you know you were going to go to Parker at some point today, and have you ever seen a scrimmage or anything like that throw him as many pitches as he threw today?

MARK KINGSTON: No, he's never thrown 57 pitches. Rarely do you see young pitchers that are not going to be starters for you throw that many pitches in intersquads. But he's a guy we know when he gets on a little roll and he's got command of the fastball and he's breaking off that curveball, he can get outs pretty quickly.

It almost felt like we're going to ride him a little bit like we did Veach day one. I think it's day one. Losing track now, we've been here for so long. But it kind of had that same feel to it. And then we kind of got to the end, and it's like, okay, it's time for the next guy.

But Parker has good stuff. As you can tell here, he's got a very low heart rate, doesn't seem to be flustered by much, and that's not an easy situation for a freshman out there, and he made a lot of big pitches. We finally started playing defense there the last two thirds of the game, and obviously that, with the way we pitched, allowed us to keep them where they were.

Q. Kind of the same question I asked Ethan, what does it say about this team to come out here and respond the way they did after last night?

MARK KINGSTON: I don't think it says anything other than what we already know, that I've been preaching to everybody that is willing to listen, that wants to listen. This is a good baseball team, one of the best in the country. It's played arguably the toughest schedule in the country. It has a lot of good kids that play the game right, that prepare right, that are tough, that have grit, and they're just never going to show up to the ballpark without the desire to go 1-0 that day.

Again, as Ethan mentioned, I've been talking to them all year about how battle tested they are and it will pay off when it really matters. That has begun. Doesn't mean anything for next week, doesn't mean anything for tomorrow, but this team's heart cannot be questioned.

Q. Another game with errors kind of plaguing you. How frustrating --

MARK KINGSTON: I think I already covered that so I don't want to cover it again.

I'm joking.

Q. How frustrating is it for another game? Do you dwell on it too much in a win?

MARK KINGSTON: No. I mean, look, do we want to make errors? No, we don't. We understand it's part of the game sometimes. We fielded I believe it was 979 in the league this year, so it has not been a problem for us. Last couple days it has been, but today we found a way to overcome it.

Had we played good defense last night, yeah, we win that game, but some days you really hit, some days you really pitch, some days you really play defense.

That's why the game is so beautiful, because you never know where you're going to be really good, what you're going to struggle with on a given day. That's why everybody loves to watch it. But frustration? A little frustrating, yeah, because we know how good we can be, and we usually are.

Q. I felt like Dalton Reeves behind the plate today brought a really calm and cooling presence. Can you speak to him in a big spot?

MARK KINGSTON: Yeah, anytime you get to start a guy that's 37 years old behind the plate (laughter), it's really good for the demeanor of your team. I joke again. Dalton was outstanding. He threw out his first base runner of the year today, and that ball came out of his hand hot, and against one of the best stolen base teams in the country. I thought that was a big lift for us when he did that.

I thought he caught extremely well. He was a good leader back there. Yeah, he was a calming presence. I'll have a decision to make tomorrow whether he catches or Messina catches because again, I don't want to overextend Messina as much effort and as much as he's put into this weekend. I don't want him to go into next weekend tired. Going to have to talk to Messina and see how he feels about it. I feel great with either one catching.

Q. I know you don't know yet on Gavin, but if he's out tomorrow, do you know who an emergency third baseman might be if something were to happen to Talmadge?

MARK KINGSTON: Yeah, Lee Ellis. Lee Ellis is more than capable of playing third, short, second, and if we need to go to Lee Ellis we'll go to him confidently.

Q. Moore, Kentucky's starting pitcher, has been good all year except for you guys have gotten him twice. Why do you think that is?

MARK KINGSTON: I don't know. It's funny, baseball, again, just like I was just talking about how all three phases you never really know what'll show up and what won't. Some matchups just favor you, whether it's because we're a heavy left-handed lineup, whether it's because of the way he pitches, as a guy with certain characteristics to his fastball, some guys get us better than others and some guys we get.

But we've had two games against him, and we were really good both times, and he's one of the better pitchers in this league, without question.

I just think it's a game of matchups. I think overall there's certain teams we match up very well with, and there's one style of play that has given us a little bit of trouble.

It's really a game of matchups, and I thought we matched up well with Moore.

Q. You guys have had 16 runs come with two outs. Was there any different approach there? What have you seen from your guys with two outs?

MARK KINGSTON: No, offensively we've been much better over the last I'd say five, six weeks, and we haven't changed our approach. We've just gotten better production. Obviously when Messina -- Messina for the first half of the season was struggling with runners in scoring position. Now he's as good as it gets.

The game turns like that sometimes, and it gets

contagious. When your best guys are doing it, it's easier for the other guys to follow suit. Our approach doesn't change, but obviously the results sometimes change.

Q. The three teams that we know that are in the semifinals all went 13-17, the 8 seed, the 10 seed, the 11 seed. Are seeds irrelevant in this tournament?

MARK KINGSTON: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think what is lost on some people is the context of who you played. A 13-17 record if you've played all the top four, five, six teams is different than a 17-13 record if you didn't.

It's such a small sample size. 30 games is an extremely small sample size when there's an unbalanced schedule. In the Big Leagues they play 162 and sometimes there's a one-game gap over who wins a division and who's a wild card team. If you don't think there's a margin for error in a 30-game schedule when it's an unbalanced schedule, you may play some of the best teams, you may play some of the big teams at the bottom. It's so random, that 13-17, I don't think it's a big enough sample.

On top of that, I will say that every team in this league is so damned good that it's a hit here, it's a walk there, and it can change by a couple wins either way. It's a damned good league is how I will sum that answer up.

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