

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Friday, May 24, 2024

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Mississippi State Bulldogs

Chris Lemonis

Connor Hujsak

Postgame Press Conference



Tennessee - 6, Mississippi State - 5

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

CHRIS LEMONIS: Yeah, tough ball game. They jumped out on us a couple, and then we were able to put together a big inning and, man, we battled. It's been a fun week here. I thought we had a little more magic left in us there late in the game.

Tip your hat to their team. They played well and then finished the ball game. Now we prepare, prepare for regional baseball next weekend and get ready to have some fun.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Connor, please.

Q. Speaking of that big inning, it felt like early in the ball game the big hits were elusive, but things kind of bunched together for you. What was the mindset when you guys were struggling and how good did it feel for you guys to break through there?

CONNOR HUJSAK: Just take it one pitch at a time, one at-bat at a time, try to pass the bat and have quality at-bats. Once we broke it through, it felt like we were on top of the world there for a little bit. We just got to keep going and getting better every time.

Q. What does it mean for you to see DJ come up with that big hit behind you and were you able to score on that play? Obviously, it had been a difficult go for him, but you all stuck behind him the whole time and also seeing the fans really get behind him every time he came to the plate.

CONNOR HUJSAK: I'm sure we all know -- it felt so good

for us. I'm sure it felt even better for him. We know what he's capable of. We have seen it all year. We all go through it and seeing that go through was big-time.

Q. What was your vantage point of that kerfuffle there in the fifth inning where some words were exchanged across the field?

CONNOR HUJSAK: I don't really pay much attention to it. It's about us in our dugout and whatever goes on, it goes on. It's all about us, so that's all I got.

Q. At the beginning of the year Coach said you could be an X factor for this team and he felt you should have got more at-bats last year, but now that you've had a full year --

CHRIS LEMONIS: Next question (laughing).

Q. Now that you've had a full year to be a full-time starter here at Mississippi State, maybe take us through your ride and also your week.

CONNOR HUJSAK: I mean, coming here was everything I've ever dreamed of. Last year was obviously tough. I put my head down, worked real hard, and it's paying off this year. This week was awesome. The SEC tournament was just as big as it is advertised. So it was a great week and I think we got a lot better and we're ready for the postseason.

Q. You guys knew what was at stake coming into this week and the goal of hosting. What do you feel like y'all were able to prove playing here, getting a couple wins, and then obviously these close games down the stretch, the last two?

CONNOR HUJSAK: I think we proved that we can play with anyone in the country. I think we're a top team. I think our résumé shows that. We're just ready to compete wherever they put us. Whether it's at the Dude or it's on the road, we're ready.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you. We'll take questions for Coach.



Q. Why does Mississippi State deserve to host an NCAA regional opportunity?

CHRIS LEMONIS: Well, I think you saw it this week. Our résumé, we play in the best league in the country, by far, and there's a lot of other good leagues and a lot of other good teams, but we finished fifth, and I don't know if a team that's finished fifth's ever not hosted. I don't know if that's happened. In a year when we're probably going to get 10 or 11 teams in there. Should probably be 11. We have got 20 SEC wins, and we did, we started slow. The only reason we're having this conversation is our first week we lost four games early in the first week of the season when we had seven guys injured.

So since that time, every other week of the season I think we've proved that and we proved it here tonight and yesterday and the day before and the day before that. We got a special group. That's not even taking into the fact that we got the nicest ballpark in college baseball to be able to host and set that up for. So I think there's a lot of reasons. I mean, that's for other people to figure out. But I like our group. I think we're one of the better teams in the country, and it would be nice to bring it back to Starkville.

Q. Could you take us through the emotions there in that fifth inning and kind of what went into the pitching change and everything that happened there.

CHRIS LEMONIS: Like Connor said, just talking back and forth and probably got out of control. So I was actually underneath. I came out late. So I didn't even see the initial stuff happen.

Q. Pico was a guy early on you didn't have and now down the stretch he's kind of come on and been a guy you can rely on. How would you assess where he is and where he could be in the postseason?

CHRIS LEMONIS: He's been good and he can be better. I don't know if -- he'll probably agree with that because there's some really good stuff he's doing, but there's also just getting back out there and getting familiar and not overthrowing. I thought that what Pico, and I told Coach Parker this all year because Pico's like the nicest kid in the locker room, but when he gets on the mound, he's really tough. He got into some jams today but is he a competitor. I thought he fought his way out of a couple jams there early against arguably the best lineup in college baseball. So I thought he really competed. That's what we get out of him. We're going to get a guy to go out there and compete for us.

Q. That five run inning that you were able to put

together, it seemed like y'all had been waiting to really explode for a lot of runs in an inning. Do you feel like that could be a catalyst?

CHRIS LEMONIS: I thought that inning was huge for us. I think that really propelled us a little bit. It got us back in the fight and just the argument, everything, just we were a little dead at that point. I thought that kind of livened everything up. We have had a tough week offensively here. I mean, I'm not anything new, but like we've also faced some really good arms. So you're competing against the best in the country, and you're trying to find your swing at the same time.

So I think Dakota was able to -- he was just pissed and wanted to hit at that point and forgot about his other at-bats, which is what he needed to do.

Q. What did you see out of the guys in the back end of the bullpen this week? And Tyson and TD both pitching three times in four days seemed to catch up to them a little bit, but obviously still very effective pitchers.

CHRIS LEMONIS: I actually thought they were really good tonight. I could see TD get a little tired there in the 9th. We had Schuelke in there this week, Dohm was in back this week, and I thought Tyson was really good. The one inning they scored we make an error and that's a tough error and it's also -- there's two chopped balls in the infield. Sometimes that's just baseball.

Early in the game they would probably say we hit some balls really hard and I would probably agree with them that we were able to catch. So baseball usually evens out, but I thought both were good tonight.

Q. Seemed yesterday when Dakota was struggling a bit and you talked to Goat pretty often when he got back to the dugout. What have their conversations been like this week and how big was it for him to get that hit there?

CHRIS LEMONIS: It was huge for him. Nobody wants to get a hit more than Dakota Jordan and Hunter Hines right now. It's not anything more than they just want to do well for their team. And they, they're a reason where we're at where we're at and the type of team. They probably pressed and tried to do a little too much this week and hopefully they got that out of their system and they will be ready to go next week.

Q. The ovation for Hunter and for Dakota when they came out, and then, number two, you guys won at least one ball game every weekend this year, and it's



been forever and a day that Mississippi State's been able to say that. What does that say about the consistency of this team that, all year long, even in ups and downs and injuries you guys have still found a way to get at least one win in a weekend?

CHRIS LEMONIS: Yeah, you grind it out. There are times we find a way, and we've had so many in this league, you have some heartbreaking losses too. So you would have a really tough loss and they just, they got, they're very resilient, they will bounce back. They don't -- you know, we get to practice on Monday they will be ready to go and forget about this weekend. I guess that's a good thing. I probably hold on to the losses longer than the players do. But I don't want 'em to hold on to 'em, I want 'em to get ready to play and take this week and make us better. The experience we went through -- we don't have a lot of postseason kids. Our group hadn't played in the postseason a lot because of the last two years so this has been a good week for us.

Q. Connor was saying earlier about believing that y'all could compete with anyone you face. For a guy like that that's returning, we have seen a lot of those guys say that throughout the season. Why do you think, after the last couple years, those guys that stuck around believe that coming into this year?

CHRIS LEMONIS: This is totally different team, so the experiences they had, and they have had 'em, Connor came to a regional in Starkville when he was a freshman or a sophomore, so those guys are, you know, they have been around and seen it. Some of the guys have learned. Hunter Hines, this is something big he wanted to do. He hadn't, you know, and he hadn't been to a regional, so that's probably where a little bit of that pressure comes is he wants to win probably as bad as anybody that locker room right now.

Q. Being able to win those first two games and kind of stick around here longer for four games, just how valuable is that going into a regional where you hope it's going to be a long weekend?

CHRIS LEMONIS: I think it's huge that was huge for us. That hit by Connor on, I don't remember what night it was, I feel like I've been here -- I feel like I'm a night owl, we had the night game all week -- but, yeah, that was huge for us to experience it, to experience the postseason to -- I tell 'em all the time, sometimes you have to hit over on that field and drive over here, and you have rain delays and you sit in the locker room, and it's so different than the regular season and I think this experience has been great for us. I mean, the city of Hoover and the SEC, I mean does anybody do it any better than this? I mean, it's the

ballpark, the fans, the hotel, just everybody takes care of you, you know, while you're here so it's a really neat experience.

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