

2022 College World Series

Thursday, June 16, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Mike Bianco

Dylan DeLucia

Tim Elko

Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We're joined by coach Mike Bianco and student-athletes Dylan DeLucia and Tim Elko.

MIKE BIANCO: I think most of you know our story. It's been a great story. It started in early February where we're preseason ranked in the top five in the country and got off to a tremendous start and really played well. And by the time we hit mid-March conference play we moved up a few in the polls and some of the polls even as high as No. 1 in the country. For a couple of weeks in mid-March when we started conference play, I said it and it sounded sarcastic -- and maybe some of it some of it isn't -- until we played the University of Tennessee and got beat up like a lot of people did this year and put us in a tailspin.

We kind of struggled to figure certain parts out, especially the pitching side of it, and maybe most specifically the starting pitching. But a lot of credit has to go to our captain, the captain, Tim Elko, and a lot of the older guys. We have an older team that held it together.

We were at a bad spot 7-14 in Southeastern Conference at one point. But they didn't let it go and continued to fight, continued to play and work and grind. And we put it together at the end of the year.

Weren't sure on selection day if we would get in. We felt we were good enough to be in, but you never know. Thankfully we were in the tournament.

And really from that day forward we've played really well. Went 3-0 in Coral Gables and 2-0 in Hattiesburg. Pitched it terrific. Hit it terrific. Fielded it really well. Just played really good baseball over the last few weeks.

Q. Tim, a couple days ago you said that you grew up watching the College World Series, that this was a really big deal. Stepping on the field today and practicing, what was that moment like?

TIM ELKO: It was an amazing moment. I've always dreamed of playing in Omaha. And I finally got here my last year. But just a really cool moment, being out there with all the guys and taking ground balls and just taking it all in. Really cool.

Q. Dylan, it feels like every start you've had the last four weeks has felt like a must-win start. How do you come out every game and get ready for those and just hang on to those wins and hold your team up high?

DYLAN DELUCIA: I'd really say, honestly, just trusting this team. They're going to put runs up. I just have to put as many zeros up as I can. That's just going to help them out.

But it also helps when, like, last week we were up 10-0 and I'm still on the mound. Just gives me more comfort on the mound. Allows me to throw the ball in the zone and let them hit it.

Q. Dylan, your journey for this year, from not starting to emerging as a strong starter and being the backbone of this team for a lot of that stretch late in the year, what does it kind of feel like to see -- you got your shot, you crushed it and your hard work is paying off to see your team now in Omaha?

DYLAN DELUCIA: I kind of don't look at it like that. Our pitching has done well so far. I'm just another guy that's on the mound for the team trying to get a win. And once my time's up I hand it to the next person. And I know they're going to do their job on mound.

Q. And, Tim, you were talking about how it was always a goal of yours to come here and that you always loved watching the College World Series. And now to know that you played such an instrumental role in helping your team get here for kind of the future of the program. What does that mean to you that it helps kind of pave the way for more potential success for this program in the future?

TIM ELKO: We've had a lot of really good teams since I've been here, but it feels like a good accomplishment to get



here. It's not our goal just to get to Omaha. It's to win a national championship. And we're ready to do that and play well.

But I think, like you said, it paves the way to show people that are thinking about coming to Ole Miss we are a really good baseball program and it makes people want to come here. And why not? We have a great fan base, a great facility, great coaches, a great culture. So no better team to come to than Ole Miss.

Q. Tim, obviously you've been a heart-and-soul guy as part of this team the last few years you catch that final out to clinch it to send you to Omaha. What's going through your head that moment and how much more of a rewarding feeling does it make it for you?

TIM ELKO: My first thought was I've got to catch this ball. But just a really awesome feeling. It's tough to put into words, but just feeling happy and excited, thankful, blessed, just to be on such an amazing team.

We overcame so much. And that made that moment so much better to be able to get to Omaha and have a chance to win a national championship.

Q. Dylan, you mentioned a second ago the Auburn team that can get hits. What do you remember about that game one outing, where you went 3 1/3 and how have you changed as a pitcher since then?

DYLAN DELUCIA: The Auburn outing? Just got more comfortable throwing more innings now, just throwing deep into the games. That's really what I can say.

Q. What do you think it was that helped you guys turn it around when you were 7-14?

TIM ELKO: We continued to have belief in each other and ourselves, and just knowing that we can go out there and do it at any point. We didn't listen to all the outside noise and let that bring us down. We just stayed within ourselves and played together as a team.

Didn't point fingers. Didn't try to do too much. Just really tried to keep believing in ourselves and know that we are one of the best teams in the country. We've got to just go out there play better. So we were able to do that and got on a roll and now we're here.

Q. We've heard about the story about Coughlin (phonetic) coming to talk to you guys. Did that change your perspective at all? Was that a light bulb moment, or was it a validation of the way you approached leading and building this team this year?

TIM ELKO: Maybe it was a little bit of both. I think it was just a reminder that, like, hey, it's a tough league, but it's tough to have success if you don't have that conviction and belief in yourselves that you're going to go out and do it. I remember him telling us you've got to have that conviction that you're going to go out and you're going to win.

And I think that kind of helped to get the ball rolling and get us back on track with his motivational talk. It sticks in my mind as a big moment and we thank him for that. But just really proud of how this team took a hold of that and started to play well after that.

Q. You've talked a couple times about being more comfortable in the season. Does playing in a big park like the Chuck make you more comfortable on the mound or do you put any stock in that at all?

DYLAN DELUCIA: I kind of really don't think about it. Like, I guess you could say I kind of just don't get really nervous when I'm on the mound. I just dial in. Don't really worry about the outside noise and just try to make pitches.

Q. Dylan, what does Tim mean to your group?

DYLAN DELUCIA: That's a lot of words. He really does. He's literally the backbone of this team. He's kept us in it. He's come up with some amazing hits, amazing home runs I've watched. I mean, just all around, he's been the guy that's just lifted this team and brought it to the next level.

Q. I saw your post obviously about your daughter and then she was going to come to the College World Series this time around. In 2014 she wasn't able to. I heard you talk about it the other day, but how awesome is that for you that she's going to be here? And are the rest of your kids going to be here as well?

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, really cool. Really cool moment. And I guess the reason -- I don't tweet much about the family or too much about the family. But I thought that was cool just because she was the only one there. In 2014 everybody else was there but her. And the reason they weren't there is, as you know, I have a son that plays for Louisville. And most of them made the trek to College Station. They were on their way back from a Super Regional. And a couple of them were working on that day.

So then the latter part of your question, they will all get here at some point. Three of the five kids obviously Cami's here. Catherine's here. Sam and Ben are here. Drew will get in Friday night. And Michael is working, coaching over in Atlanta right now and will make it early next week.

Q. If I'm not mistaken, I think y'all were one of the three finalist to try to get Jack Moss this past season. What was it about his game and him that intrigued you all?

MIKE BIANCO: A Jack Moss question at the Ole Miss press conference. He's terrific. You can see -- I don't think you ever really know -- and obviously Jim did a terrific job in the portal, once he got the job because he wasn't the only one that played so, so well.

Jack had a great series against us. And certainly saw from afar what a great finish, certainly one of the reasons they're in Omaha because of the way he played.

But I think when you look at the size and you look at the bat control and you look at what type of hitter, you hope that he'll get to your program and do that and obviously he's done that for A&M.

Q. Same question I asked Dylan there. What does Tim Elko mean to your guys' group?

MIKE BIANCO: It is, I think it's a tough question just because I think he affects the team in a lot of different levels. One, you just look at the production -- a guy that's hitting the middle lineup for the past three-plus years and just set the Ole Miss season home run record at 22. Leads the team in RBIs. Great defender at first base. He's a big-body guy but moves around terrific. He can play the outfield, can play third base. Just happens to be first base especially coming off of the knee surgery.

And off the field what a tremendous leader, what a tremendous representative of our institution. People say it and I think they say kind of tongue in cheek, but he is the face of the program. I think if you talked to our beat reporters -- today we come to Omaha and there's some ESPN things up a few hours ago. And some guys get some questions, and Tim's literally there for an hour and 20 minutes nonstop.

Practice ends and everybody wants a piece of Tim and that's because Tim is that guy. He's the face of the program.

But academically he's, like, a 4.0 student. You hate to say anybody's perfect, but he's pretty darned close.

Q. We've asked the players, this is all their first time getting here, but for you what was that moment like, taking it all in yesterday, walking through the tunnel out to the field, just getting back here, what is that like for you?

MIKE BIANCO: Neat, I guess that's not a great word but it was neat. I think it's different. When we got here the first time and challenged the kids a little bit that we want to come here and succeed.

'14, we won a couple games, we were 2-2 and ended up coming in third. You want to come here and have success. And so it wasn't anything dramatic for me because I've seen it. '14 had been such a long time since being an assistant coach and I had never been to, at that point, TD Ameritrade. I'd never seen it necessarily in person. So that was probably a little different walking into the stadium here.

I think I have appreciated, even back to the Super Regional, just watching the kids, watching guys, not just Tim. Tim gets a lot of the pub but other guys like Bench and Graham and Cioffi and guys that have been on this team. They've won a ton of games but they haven't played in this stadium.

To watch them walk in it and take pictures, that's been really cool. Clement made a comment to Tim right after the dog pile, like, can you believe you almost signed. You might not have come -- did this. Something to that effect.

And it's just really neat, I think, as a coach to watch the players, the student-athletes achieve these types of things, individually and as a team. And as I started, you've heard the story, this has been a really cool story up to this point. And to watch them get through all of that, from the very high, the beginning of the season, to about as low as you can get and to get back here it's been neat.

So to me the neat is not personal. It's just to watch them and take pictures and appreciate it and the genuine happiness and fulfillment at least to this point.

Q. Some of the Auburn players were talking about, the older ones were talking about their experience here from 2019. Is that significant that their players have some experience in this stadium, in this setting?

MIKE BIANCO: I don't know if it's significant. I think it's good. I think one of the challenges, and Coach Bourbon (phonetic) used to say, when you get there the first time there's so much. It's so different than just the regular series.

Yeah, you're just playing baseball and all that, but just look at today and you look and the picture in the front, and an hour-plus interviews with the media before and ESPN. And then the practice. And then you come here to a press conference. This isn't what they normally do, even in a Regional or Super Regional format.

And then all the other things that people don't think about the logistics to get here, the logistics of their families to get here, trying to find hotels and tickets and all of that.

That's why a lot of people, Bourbon used to say, in Super Bowls and World Series, those types of things, it's difficult your first time.

So I think it's important that they've been here before, but I don't think it means that you can't win. There's stories of teams that have been here the first time and have won.

So we try to, with our experience and to try to make it as structured, try -- so they know when they can kind of take a break and go have a steak with their family and when they need to lock in and be at a meeting or be at practice and try to structure their time so they can do both -- they can enjoy it, but they can also play baseball and come here and have success.

Q. Can you tell us who your starter will be Saturday night? And just talk about playing Auburn in that first game?

MIKE BIANCO: Dylan DeLucia. And what was the second part of that question?

Q. Just talk about playing Auburn.

MIKE BIANCO: I've answered a few questions this week back home with our beat writers about playing a conference opponent.

There's obviously a little bit of being familiar with them and watching some of the video today, knowing the names. But we're a different team. They're a different team. They had, I think, a really great year and about as underrated as a year of any team in our league.

I think I'm correct in this that they won the most games in our league of the teams that played Tennessee. And they won 16 conference games and obviously a very, very competitive conference.

And so utmost respect for their team. Butch does a tremendous job there. And with Tim Hudson -- coach, a Hall of Fame guy coaching the pitchers, and Gabe Gross does a tremendous job with the offense. It will be a big challenge for us on Saturday.

Q. So three of the four teams on your side of the bracket are from the SEC, let alone the SEC West. Is there a different mindset to having two other familiar teams compared to teams that may be out of your

league, maybe a different plan of attack teams they're used to or not so much?

MIKE BIANCO: That's what we've been working on all week, just really trying to change it up. We've been bunting a lot in practice. And stealing a lot. And looking to -- I'm teasing.

You get to this point and you are who you are. The question about playing the conference opponents, you're familiar with them. I think there's an ease of trying to look at scouting reports because not only are you watching video but you've played and you've seen a lot of that live.

There's a little bit of being comfortable with that, but at the end of the day, like I said, we played Auburn some, maybe 10 weeks ago. And they're different. And we're different. And we've kind of been to hell and back so we're obviously different.

But the same with Arkansas. They're a team that they were playing really good baseball when we played them up in Fayetteville and they didn't finish the season particularly strong, but then played great in postseason. And man, they played in two tough venues to get here in Oklahoma State and North Carolina.

We're all a little bit different, so it's going to come down to like it always does and should is who plays the best. I think there's too much made up of -- and that's why I was teasing; I didn't mean to tease you or hurt your feelings -- but it's too much of the scouting reports and all of that. It comes down to which guys pitch better, which guys get the timely hit. That's usually who wins.

Q. We were talking with Peyton Chatagnier right before you left to go to Omaha, and when preparing for a big stage such as this, he talked about visualizing himself having success, making the big at-bat, getting the ground ball to get the final out. Is that something you really challenge your players to do? If so, what all goes into that?

MIKE BIANCO: Visualization. Yes. I think we're believers in the mental game. We have a system. We have a peak performance coach that we contract out and do a program with him in the fall guy by the name of Brian Cain. We've used his stuff since 2009.

And just a big believer. And part of it is visualization. Part of it is seeing yourself succeed. I referred to Coach Bourbon. He's always said it. It happens twice -- once in your mind and then in real life.

And in our game where confidence and belief is so, so

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

important to not only your individual success -- hitting, pitching, fielding, those types of things where you really don't have a chance if you don't think you can do those skills.

But then also from a teams side. From the believing that Dylan is going to get them out or Tim's going to get a hit, those things are transferrable. That belief, people feel that. And people feel those, you didn't know it maybe at times but you can feel the confidence in that other dugout.

So I think it helps that mental side, not only helps from an individual standpoint, as Peyton's saying, but also from a team standpoint as well.

Q. Auburn is starting Joseph Gonzalez against you guys on Saturday. I know you didn't face him back in the regular season. Have you had a chance to look at him yet? Is that something you want to do later in the weekend?

MIKE BIANCO: I've seen him throughout the season. We're fortunate, maybe, that he was injured. When we played him we didn't get to face him. But I've seen him as the head coach for the U.S.A. National Team. Watched him all year as a guy that was high on our list, and a guy that will be with us this summer.

So I know how good he is and watched him probably not every start but a little bit probably of every start since he's gotten healthy back in March.

Q. You talked about Tim Elko, Jacob Gonzalez, Dylan DeLucia. Who are some of the unsung heroes in your locker room?

MIKE BIANCO: Wow, I think when you look at -- you always have those stars and the marquee guys, the Jacob Gonzalezes and Tim Elkos. You can't get here without them. But there's guys that, I don't know, maybe sometimes -- I think they're start but other people may consider them as glue guys, guys like Justin Bench, bats at the top of the lineup. Doesn't get a lot of fanfare. But, man, gets a ton of hits. Maybe the best defender on our field at just about any position. Great baserunner, great leader, great attitude.

Another one of those is Tim Elko's roommate. One of them is rubbing off on the other.

The other guy is the other roommate in Kevin Graham. All three of them, there's a lot of hits. There's a lot of homers, and there's a lot of wins in that apartment. And Kevin Graham probably is the most underrated player on that offensive team.

Last year, I don't want to use the word snubbed because I don't think that's necessarily true, but wasn't selected on any of the first or second team All-SEC. A guy that hit .350, 15 jacks, hits in the middle of our lineup in a really good lineup, this is last year.

And this year he got injured fourth week of the season and missed about a month, maybe four and a half weeks. But as soon as he came back, we injected him into the lineup, probably unfairly, because with the fractured wrist, he wasn't able to hit for that month. So the guy doesn't hit for a month and you just throw him in the lineup, bats fourth in the SEC.

And he did okay, but you could tell he wasn't where he normally is from -- timing wise, strength wise, just rhythm. But once we got maybe three weeks into it, maybe the end of April, he started swinging it like Kevin can. And he could be a difference maker in the lineup. Probably throughout the lineup, those two guys.

Another guy nobody talks about again is Kemp Alderman. A tremendous sophomore year he's had. He played very limited as a true freshman, and has had a terrific year batting in the 5 hole basically the whole year for us.

Q. You had talked about being to hell and back basically and just given that you were the last of the at-large teams to be selected in the NCAA Tournament, what's kind of the morale of the team all together now that you are here at the College World Series and you're one step closer to a national championship?

MIKE BIANCO: I think we're like everybody. When you talk about morale once you get here. That was weeks ago, seems like a long time ago when we were sitting in our dugout club on that Memorial Day morning, hoping to hear our names.

When our names were called, I've been there for 21 of those. And 18 times our name was called. I don't remember of those 18 times ever seeing that type of emotion from our team.

Obviously there's been years where we've been the national seed or host site and we knew we were getting in. But even the times where maybe it was close or weren't quite sure, these guys were super excited to hear their names called on Monday.

But the morale now, three weeks later, that seems like a long time ago. We've played a lot of baseball since that point. And I know they're excited to be here this week. Like everybody is.

Q. How surprised were you that Tennessee is not here? And did Notre Dame do everyone a big favor by keeping the Vols home?

MIKE BIANCO: I will say this. I've listened to a lot of people make comments. They had one of the greatest years in college baseball. People will try to shy away from that because they're not here. But to that point, I've done this for a long time. I don't know how many teams that I can think of that were that dominant for that many weeks.

And really a team that didn't have a flaw, the people try to pick flaws, maybe you can steal a few bases or -- when you start saying that's their flaw, you know they're pretty good. Tremendous rotation, great bullpen. They can really swing it. They can defend it. They play with a ton of confidence and so on.

I say that because I played them myself and I've watched them over -- dominate our conference. But the reason they're not here is because this game is really hard. And people sometimes don't understand that the best team doesn't always win. It's the team that plays the best.

And in baseball sometimes you can have a tough weekend. Or you could have a tough game in a game three and not get here. We know that very well. Am I surprised? In a way, yeah, maybe in that the best team in the country didn't get here.

But not surprised that it happened. It happened a year ago to the University of Arkansas, where they had a tremendous year and had a tough weekend at the wrong time. And so it happens.

So you can think it's something else, but it's really baseball. It's really that sometimes they get the big hit or they make the big pitch and you end up on the wrong side of the scoreboard. But they were certainly not just the best team through the, whatever that is, 16 weeks, but as good a team as I've seen maybe ever.

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