

2022 College World Series

Monday, June 20, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Mike Bianco

Hunter Elliott

Justin Bench

Calvin Harris

Postgame Press Conference



Ole Miss - 13, Arkansas - 5

MIKE BIANCO: Lost my voice a little bit, sorry. We were terrific tonight. Just really played well and it starts on the mound. And Hunter was just like he's pitched the second half of the season. Unfortunately, for him, we didn't play great defense early.

And not taking anything away from Arkansas but he shouldn't have given up a run today. We mispositioned Gonzalez in the first inning and allowed a routine ground ball to the shortstop become a base hit to start the game. And then with two outs, sun/wind, fly ball to left field. Actually got five outs in the first inning.

And, so, then of course two unearned runs in the second. But I think what people haven't seen before or haven't seen, if you haven't seen Hunter before, you saw why he's so good, that here's a freshman on the biggest stage in amateur baseball and he didn't let it affect him. He just couldn't to pitch and work and grind.

And offensively we were really, really good. Mike Clement and the offense, just a great approach. And got some huge hits. I thought we got some big walks. So many guys had huge days. Of course, Calvin and Justin, but others -- Elko had a huge home run, one of the longest balls I've ever seen hit here.

And then I thought Graham had a good day as well, a couple of base hits a couple of really good ABs. Just a really good night for us.

Q. Calvin, you had a three-hit night. Justin a four-hit night. Talk about what you guys were seeing from the pitching staff particularly with how many pitchers they used against you all tonight?

JUSTIN BENCH: We had a scouting report. We thought they were going to staff it, in which they did. They threw a pitcher an inning there until it got out of hand.

But, we knew what we were doing, what our scouting report was. And just go up there have tough at-bats and try and get each pitcher out of the game, which is what we did.

CALVIN HARRIS: Going off what JB said as well, we kind of knew what they were going to come in and do, and just really compete well at the plate and keep that approach through each pitcher they threw out there.

Q. Not that you weren't a confident team before, but the longer this goes on, does your confidence and your belief reach a new level?

JUSTIN BENCH: No doubt. We knew that from the start. We had a rough patch in the middle where we were 7-14. We just stuck together, and now I don't know how many wins we have in a row now, but just with the leadership of Tim Elko, we just stuck together and kept winning games.

HUNTER ELLIOTT: Like he said, obviously baseball is a big momentum game, and we're building a lot of momentum right now. That's obviously what you look to do in the postseason and getting hot is a true thing in baseball. Just keep building confidence, that's what we look to do.

Q. Hunter, your bats got going early today. How does that help you have success on the pitching side of things?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: It's huge. Pitching with a lead's huge. And these guys have been able to do that for me lately. I think I've had a good amount of run support lately. It's easier to pitch with a lead obviously than being down runs or tied, having to make every single pitch perfect. It allows you to flood the strike zone and let whatever happens happen.

Q. Justin, how much confidence have you been

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feeling at the plate? Four-hit night. Just remarkable stats you've been having this season. What are the mechanics you were bringing with the pitching staff that you have been seeing with Arkansas all season?

JUSTIN BENCH: Just trying to have good at-bats. And a lot of people had good at-bats today, with Tim Elko and the big home run and Calvin. We're just working with Coach Clem and the scouting report and just trying to figure out what that day the pitcher is going to bring.

Q. Justin, how valuable has it been these past couple of weeks what Calvin and Garrett and have done when you get up there and the order flips?

JUSTIN BENCH: Very valuable. Having Garrett Wood come in and play any position on the infield -- and Calvin, for sure. Everybody, having the eight, nine hitter come up, getting the order to turn around for Gonzo, Tim and Kevin, that's huge.

Q. Hunter, in that third inning, they have a lead off walk you picked that guy off. And they went back and forth those innings. Did that pick off seem like a big moment for you guys?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: Absolutely, yeah, I think they got the leadoff guy on the first three innings, counting that one. And erasing him and technically getting the leadoff out was huge. It allowed me to settle in and attack the next guy and start to settle in a little bit and put it on cruise mode.

Q. I'm sure you've heard it before Hunter, you looked like Doug Nihazy out there and you wear the same number he does. How much are you trying to emulate his game when you're throwing?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: I don't try emulate his game. Lot of respect for the guy. He was an incredible pitcher here of course. I don't think we have too much of a similar style.

But I've gotten that a lot recently. We look a like. Wear the same number, left-handed, everything like that. I don't know if I try to imitate my game after anyone.

Q. Justin, you mentioned Tim Elko and his leadership a couple of times up there. What have you seen from him and, not just this year but through the time that you've been together, and what he's meant to this team?

JUSTIN BENCH: I've been here with him, every year he's been a captain, and he's also my roommate. Seeing him off the field with the team and on the field, he's able to just bring us together, keep his composure and make sure

everybody is doing the right thing.

Q. As you just kind of sit in the dugout and just watch the run that this team is on, what's going through your mind? It's almost like keep my hands off because these guys are just rolling right now?

MIKE BIANCO: There's some of that. Over the last probably three weeks we've met less as a team. There's things obviously that we have to meet. We have to prepare with the scouting report, as Justin alluded to a few times. Clem meeting with the hitters and I'm meeting with the pitchers. A lot of the team meetings we've either shortened or did away with.

And so there is some of that. That's not even being sarcastic.

But just it's been a neat run. You've seen so many teams over the years get on this. And I think Hunter said, getting hot's real. It's not just some facetious, it's confidence, kids playing well. So, when they're doing that, sometimes the best thing you can do as a coach is let them go.

We've tried to do that. Sometimes it's hard. It's not what we do often. But sometimes the best thing you can do is just get out of their way.

Q. Ten out of your 19 runs in this tournament have come with two outs. Just talk about the two-out approach you're seeing from the guys and what's working for them?

MIKE BIANCO: I think we said it the other day. Somebody else asked a similar question. And I learned from my mentor a long time ago: The most important thing to win a baseball game is dominant pitching. We've had that. But the second most important thing is timely hit. And we've had a ton of those over the last three weeks.

And a really good offense, as I think many of you know, but sometimes offensively to get things rolling it's tough. And it's hard to score runs unless you're going to score them with two outs. You can score them with none or one, but those two-out runs are back breakers. And when they happen to you on the other side, when you're a pitch away from getting off the field. And we've been in that position as well. And so it's nice that we're getting some of those.

Q. You've had a lot of highs and lows this season. What's it mean to be 2-0 in Omaha and now one win away from the championship series?

MIKE BIANCO: Obviously we're excited. This is a big game. I think either losing the first one or the second one,

man, it's tough. It's tough to get through because you've got to play four days in a row and you've got to win the next three just to get to the championship series.

So this was, as I thought about it this morning, and trying to go through the pitching plan and different scenarios and how we would use the bullpen, knowing that if you lose you've got a lot of innings to get through over the next few days, and fortunately we didn't have to use that, but we were ready to empty the tank and use whoever tonight and not worry about the next day to win this game.

And fortunately we didn't have to do that. Hunter was just really, really good. But it was neat.

I may have said it, or maybe I'm confused, maybe I said it on the radio before I came in here, but tonight Mason Nichols threw, a true freshman. Hasn't thrown since Coral Gables.

Our closer, Brandon Johnson, hasn't thrown since Coral Gables. That's amazing. You're winning games because we haven't been in a game closer than four runs. So I don't like bringing the closer, as you can see tonight, when you have a big lead, they're just not used to pitching like that. They're used to pitching with a lot of adrenaline, and tight ballgames. And so there's times where we just won't run them out there because the lead's so big and because we've played so well, scored so many runs and pitched so well in front.

But that was nice, and we had to get those guys out there today regardless of the score. Those guys had to touch the mound.

Q. For a guy like Calvin, who has had his ups and downs this year, what can a game like this mean for him, and what have you seen from him that brought the bat back after a couple of rough months?

MIKE BIANCO: We inserted him one of those games in Coral Gables, had a good day, hit an opposite field double. Playing him ever since.

And as you saw, Nick, he did this at the beginning of the season. And we really needed that. That was a shot in the arm because that's when Dunhurst went down with a pulled hamstrings a few weeks.

And Calvin's, be a catcher on probably 95 percent or 98 percent of the other teams. We just happen to have Hayden Dunhurst, so he doesn't get to behind the dish very much. But in that time we needed him to catch. But, boy, he hit .500 like the first six weeks of the season.

When we started conference play, he wasn't playing regularly. That can happen offensively. He struggled a little bit on offense, struggled offensively and in conference play. The last few weeks he's been terrific, and we needed it right at the right time.

Q. How invaluable has it been what Garrett and Calvin have done in the 8, 9, to flip it and give you some opportunities at days when the top of the order gets there?

MIKE BIANCO: Those are the best offenses. The best offenses where you sit up and you hear coaches say 1 through 9, they're difficult, hard to navigate through that lineup.

There's lineups that are scary in the middle. There are lines that are top heavy. We've had some really good lineups here, and those lineups that are really good are you look up and the 8 hole guy's hitting three something or he's got 10 home runs.

Look at Peyton. He's got 11 home runs. He's been batting seventh, eighth, ninth, practically the whole season.

So I think because baseball is such a neat game where you can't call timeout at the end, right, and give it to your best player. Design a play to throw it to him or let him take the final shot.

Baseball's that game where you get to the ninth inning, the lineup is the lineup, those guys are batting. Or somebody asked earlier, with two outs, the runners are on and you can't bat Tim Elko; you can't devise a play.

So the best offenses are the ones who can hit 1 through 9 because that's going to give you the most opportunities to score.

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