

2022 College World Series

Saturday, June 25, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Mike Bianco

Jack Dougherty

Tim Elko

Mason Nichols

Postgame Press Conference



Ole Miss - 10, Oklahoma - 3

THE MODERATOR: Mike, give us an overview, please.

MIKE BIANCO: I really thought we played well tonight. I thought the first inning was huge. Bennett is so good, and Big Leaguer out there, and to draw him the first game of the Championship Series I think is a tough challenge for the offense.

But after two outs Tim got a big base hit. I think he advanced on a wild pitch fastball, and then Kevin got a huge hit through the 6-hole, which one of the things we did in practice yesterday, getting those left-handers to work the other way.

A lot of credit to Kevin. A lot of credit to Coach Clem. I thought that was big to get on the board in the first. Obviously, Jack had a tremendous day. I thought super fastball command, super slider command. He just lived ahead in the count. We got a few -- scratched a few more runs.

Then we kind of had a hiccup there. They got a couple of hits. Another bunt that we don't make a play on. But I thought Mason, true freshman, comes in there and obviously such a big moment in that game. I thought that was really the baseball game there to get off the field there with just a couple.

Then, of course, we hadn't scored for a while, and the big home run by T.J. and then Bench, and then I guess Calvin was in between. Three home runs back to back to back. I don't know if that's ever been done here at this stadium.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Jack, I think this was your first start in almost three months. Almost to the day. How has the last day kind of been for you in terms of handling emotions, and how do you kind of keep yourself composed given the gravity of the game?

JACK DOUGHERTY: I tried not to think about it too much. Just wanted to go out there and be myself. Found out yesterday that I was starting. My mom actually got mad at me because I didn't tell her. I didn't want to think about it too much, didn't want to get in my own head. I just wanted to go out there and pitch.

Q. Mason, coming into a situation like that as a true freshman, what does that do for your confidence when you come in in a situation like that and you only allowed the one run there towards the end of that inning, but then you get out of just a huge situation? What does that do for your confidence?

MASON NICHOLS: It was great. God gets all the glory for that, though, because I asked Him for some peace and some strength before I went out there, and He gave me both.

I was just so excited to get out of it for the team. It was a great opportunity, and looking forward to next couple of days.

Q. What did Mike say to you before you warmed up, and what was the mentality of approaching somebody like Graham, who is so successful?

MASON NICHOLS: My mentality was I know that Graham is a great hitter, but whenever I came in, I just wanted to throw my best pitches. Coach was calling it. He told me when I came out there, just fill up the zone. Slider away first pitch, so that was the game plan.

I was just trying to get my slider down, throw the fastball, locate it well, and I did it.

Q. What set the tone in the top of the 8th inning when you hit three straight home runs?

TIM ELKO: I think we knew we needed to get a couple more runs. They've got a good offense, and we were holding them at bay, but it would have felt a lot better to get a couple more runs.

You know, whenever T.J. hit that ball out, it felt like all the momentum shifted to us. Then, you know, Calvin followed with one, and J.B. followed with another.

It was great to get those runs in and huge hits by those guys.

Q. This is for any of the players: Can you talk a little bit about what that general atmosphere was? Were there times it felt like a home game with all the noise that was in your favor?

TIM ELKO: Yeah. I would say there was probably 20,000 Rebels there. It was an amazing environment. Super fun to play in. Just having all that support, it makes it a lot of fun to play.

Shout out to our fans for making it up here to Omaha and making it a really cool experience so far.

Q. Tim, down in Columbus, what was that moment like when those back-to-back-to-back homers were hit? What was the dugout like, and how high was morale? Because at that point the game was pretty much over after those three were.

TIM ELKO: Morale was real high. We've done that before. We hit three homers in a row at home, but definitely trumps it hitting here.

It was really, really cool to watch. I think I was in the hole for the last one. Just taking in all the fans going crazy in the outfield, and it was a really cool experience.

Like you said, just helped to carry us there at the end of the game for the win.

Q. Jack, what allowed you to have so much success today, and could you walk us through what you were throwing?

JACK DOUGHERTY: I think I was only fastball-slider today, but Coach B grabbed me before the game and said, just be you. Go out, attack with your fastball, get ahead in counts, and just pitch like you pitch, and you'll be successful.

Q. Mason, it's a pretty big situation. Any nerves at all? Butterflies, anything?

MASON NICHOLS: Absolutely. 100%. For me I had plenty of butterflies. The biggest thing was that the coaches have been good enough to trust me and put me in those situations earlier in the year in big environments like Trustmark Park, Swayze, those sort of places.

So I was just focused on doing my job, and I'm glad I got it done.

Q. Tim, you guys had six two-out RBIs. A couple of days ago Kevin said those can be backbreakers. I know all runs can be big in these games. Just how big are those two-out rallies?

TIM ELKO: They're huge. We harp on it all the time that even with two outs, there's still 33% of the inning left.

Sometimes teams can, oh, two outs, people are getting ready to get back on the field, but there's still a lot of inning left. And we take that to heart and try to drive runs in. Like you said, those can be backbreakers. Anytime you get runs on the board, it's good.

Q. Tim, everybody else has done a really good job of having a poker face, and you spent the whole time up here trying to suppress a smile. How over the next -- between now and tomorrow afternoon, how do you manage that? The excitement of tonight, and also knowing you have to -- and then as the leader of the team, how do you manage that with everybody?

TIM ELKO: As you know, I don't really smile a whole lot. I usually keep a pretty straight face.

No, we still have another game to win. It's obviously great to win the first one, but we still have one more to take home the whole thing. Will be rested up tomorrow, focused up, and ready to win one more.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Congratulations tonight. He so you tomorrow. Questions for Mike.

Q. Mike, you brought up how great Jack was today. First start since that Tennessee series. What kind of gave you the confidence that he was the right guy for this sort of moment?

MIKE BIANCO: I think a couple of things. One, looking -- their approach at the plate, they're patient. They're a very patient team. They walk a lot. And felt that we needed somebody that was going to fill up the strike zone. Of the guys that were available, I thought he was the best guy to do that.

I thought he could deliver and land some sliders early. But,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

again, you didn't know he was going to walk out there and throw five perfect innings like that.

I was asked earlier, hey, what was your expectation? I try not to box him in. Try not to put that kind of pressure on him. There's a guy that's been in a bullpen, as you mentioned, probably the last 60% of the season, and he has been really successful at that, and you want him to have that approach and to go attack the zone and make pitches early.

So try to keep that mentality versus have some arbitrary inning total that he is supposed to get or how many outs he is supposed to get. Just go out there and get the first out, get the next out, put a zero on the board and give us a chance to score. He was even better than that today.

Q. When it went 8-2, you were caught in the middle. You throw Johnson for an inning, Mallitz, extend him. What was your thought process on what to do there?

MIKE BIANCO: It's a tough one. We had Gaddis down there in case he was available to pitch, but he really didn't want to throw him today, coming off about 75 pitches a couple of days. But he was available, wanted to throw, wanted the ball.

Normally he would be a great option in that situation because he pounds the strike zone with the lead. You got a lot of left-handers in that lineup, but that's probably not the best place for him at whatever it was at the time, 8-2, 8-3.

Yeah, it was a coin flip. You've seen me enough. We get to that point, the guy has already thrown, he is hot. Let him finish it and let's win the game and move on rather than trying to dissect it. Then we went out and scored a couple in the 9th. The lead got bigger. We ran Derek down there because he is another strike thrower, but we didn't need to use him.

Q. Mike, it was the first time since 1998 here that there were back-to-back to back homers, and those were essentially kind of what helped really put the game away. I asked Tim about it, but what was that kind of like for you there?

MIKE BIANCO: Everybody will talk about the three homers, but the first one was huge because we kind of screwed up an inning not getting a bunt down. We go for a steal. Their catcher makes a perfect throw to third, and they get Peyton. It looks like we're going to kind of just kind of wreck an inning that it looked like we were going to be able to score, and T.J. comes in left on left, and I think it was a breaking ball that he got a great swing on and hit it

into the bullpen.

Then, of course, Cal, where he hits them, not many balls get out to that spot. Then, of course, Justin jumps in as well.

I thought that kind of knocked the wind out of their sails. It would for anybody, but I thought the big one was T.J. just because of the way the inning looked like it was going to end.

Q. I know you said a couple of days you expected a lot of Ole Miss fans out here tonight. Did you expect it to be like an amplified Swayze Field tonight?

MIKE BIANCO: It felt like Swayze Field because of how many Ole Miss -- because how partisan maybe it was, but man, it felt like a football game out there.

On the field it was that loud. Swayze has been pretty loud. I don't know if Swayze has ever been that loud.

When they played "Sweet Caroline" whatever inning it was, I have never heard anything like that. Just impressive. Thankful. I think as a coach, it's really neat to sit back. And you don't do it too much in the game, but it was so loud that a couple of times you did. You look up and go, wow, all these people showed up here.

It's not an easy place to get to. It's not a cheap place to get to. A lot of people, it meant the world for them to be here this weekend. They're passionate, aren't they?

Q. Obviously, Mason talked about it a little bit, but from a coaching perspective how big is it for you seeing that guy come out of the bullpen and be able to deliver in that situation?

MIKE BIANCO: He really has done it -- it's easy to say he has done it the second half of the season, but especially in post-season. We haven't been in a lot of tight games, and that might have been, obviously, where he is at on this stage.

But bases loaded, no outs, and facing one of the best hitters in the country. He gets a couple of punch-outs. Then he lets one get across, but that's really my fault. We just didn't want to Tredaway to hit a double or gapper and score everybody. And he is able to land his slider a lot, but I should have went fastball and made him hit it. We didn't want to risk that where we were in the game.

Q. What was your thinking when you went to Nichols? A lot of people -- in fact, I thought you might go to Mallitz at that point?



to this point not realizing that.

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MIKE BIANCO: I thought it was a little early for Mallitz. At that point you're looking for outs and how do we get to the end?

Again, if I knew it was bases loaded and it was 4-1, then maybe I would have done it differently, but sometimes it doesn't work that way. It doesn't work as perfectly as that.

We don't field the bunt, and then he walks a guy. The guy that had a no-hitter perfect game going, and he was awesome. All of a sudden we misplay a bunt. A couple of base hits, which is obviously part of the game, but then we don't field the bunt and don't get an out. Then he walks a guy.

Mason was the guy that was up at that time and hot and ready to go. Mallitz wasn't ready. Originally going from the 6th inning on, there's a lot of game left. There's 12 outs left.

I thought that was going to be too much to put with the lead to put too much on Mallitz and Johnson to get to the end. We wanted to see if Mason could get us an inning or two.

Q. I want to ask you about facing Cade Horton tomorrow. He was previously committed to Ole Miss. What unique challenge does he bring to the mound?

MIKE BIANCO: He has really had a great last month or so and coming off of surgery. He has tremendous stuff. Saw a little bit of his game.

Again, we were preparing for this game and preparing for Bennett, so I haven't really locked in too much. But I know he has pitched really well down the stretch here and had a great game the other day here. The guy is super talented.

Q. I know it's natural to feel the anticipation for the guys being one win away. How do you handle or harness those emotions going into the quick turnaround?

MIKE BIANCO: I think they get it. We'll talk about it in meetings tomorrow, but you want them ready. I think sometimes you worry too much about being too calm.

That was kind of the message today, is to go for it. You are here in the National Championship Series, and you deserve to be here, and it's time to press the gas pedal and go for it, to be aggressive.

So we'll try to juggle that. Again, I think they realize that you have to win. To win you have to play really well to beat a really good team in the other dugout. You don't get

