

# 2022 College World Series

Sunday, June 26, 2022

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

**Ole Miss Rebels**

**Coach Mike Bianco**

**Tim Elko**

**Brandon Johnson**

**Dylan DeLucia**

**Jacob Gonzalez**

Postgame Press Conference



representatives and, again, just have been sensational. And we just want to thank them, a great coaching staff that I'm blessed with, but we want to thank the players for allowing us to be along for this great ride.

**Q. Tim, in February I remember you telling us that this is where you guys wanted to be and that this was what you came back for. Now that you got the job done, what are you feeling right now?**

TIM ELKO: I mean, it's hard to put into words. No, really, me and Kev and people that maybe could have gone, we came back one more year to play with the guys sitting up here with me and that were on the field today. We came back to play one more time as a team and go for the shot to win a national championship, and obviously we did that.

It feels amazing.

There's so much to be said about how much we overcame this year, how much we had to fight through, how much we had to pick each other up and never let ourselves get too down. This story of our season is going to be told for years and years and years to come.

This is the best Ole Miss baseball team in history, and it feels so good, and it's an honor to be a part of it.

**Q. Brandon, from the second the ball hit Dunhurst's glove to the dog pile, what did that emotion feel like getting the last out of the College World Series?**

BRANDON JOHNSON: There was no emotion. I kind of blacked out. Usually after a game, I usually have something -- not choreographed, but I know what I'm going to do after the game. And there, I had no emotion. It was a dream come true. Ever since you're a little kid, you dream of being on the mound in those situations. And when it happened, you just let go of yourself because you realize that you did do it.

And it didn't hit me until probably 20 minutes after it happened, after the last pitch happened what was going on. So when it happened, the emotions were true, because there was none.

Ole Miss 4, Oklahoma 2

MIKE BIANCO: I'm a little out of words. I've been out there it seems like for an hour and a half talking to a lot of people. I don't know who we were talking to. I guess we weren't talking to you guys.

Just so proud, as you can only imagine, to get to this point. We've talked about it the whole time here but even before here, the journey that this team has been through and where they've come from. I've talked about the great leadership of Tim and all the -- not just seniors but upperclassmen. I don't think we get to this point without that.

One of the things I've always learned, people say, hey, how's the leadership, well, you can't answer those questions until the season is over because when you're going through fall practice, there's no adversity. There's no 7-4 teams. Everybody plays. Everybody pitches.

But you find out at the end what you're made of.

Again, we're not here without the leadership. It's just been a neat run.

I didn't get a chance to speak to the team. I will at some point, but I'll say it to these guys and I'll say it to you: It's cool. When people say, hey, what are you feeling, I'm just so happy for them. I'm happy for all these guys and what they've done to put themselves in position, to learn life lessons here.

That's why we do these things, is to learn things in intercollegiate athletics, and these guys have been great



**Q. Dylan, you go from transferring to Ole Miss this year, weren't in the starting rotation at the beginning of the year to now the Most Outstanding Player of the College World Series. Talk about your emotions after this national championship.**

DYLAN DeLUCIA: It's kind of hard to put them into words. I'm just truly -- I just feel blessed to be a part of this team, to be a part of these coaches. They've taught me so much this year.

I've grown up so much just in that aspect of being a teammate, being a better teammate, just looking up to Tim really. He's like a mentor to me, the way he's just picked me up, kept me going, put my head on straight. I've never seen someone like that, and it's truly a blessing to have this team and these coaching staffs.

**Q. Tim, you mentioned how much all these guys mean to you. You played it seems like a million games with all of them. How emotional is it for you knowing that it was your last game with them? And also what does it mean to be able to know that you guys went out kind of on top?**

TIM ELKO: Yeah, it hasn't really quite sunk in yet that this was my last game in an Ole Miss baseball uniform and playing with this team and the guys that I played with for so many years. But right now I'm just proud to be a national champion and be a part of a team that did some amazing things this year.

That's what I'm proud of right now.

**Q. Dylan or Brandon, can you put into words what this past month has been and the pitching staff and the performances that y'all gave, just from Miami, Hattiesburg, and this past week?**

BRANDON JOHNSON: We knew we were the staff from the beginning of the year, even in the fall, we saw how competitive it was. When we were going through that 7-14 time with the struggles, we knew that wasn't us.

Being able to get the recognition that the staff deserves, really from the starting standpoint, Dylan and Elliott took off, and in the bullpen we pitched to our ability. We always knew we were capable of doing what we have done for the past month or so. It just feels great to actually see the work that we put in, go out and be successful.

DYLAN DeLUCIA: I can't top that. That was spot on.

**Q. Tim, kind of building on what Dylan said earlier**

**about the coaching staff, for guys who have been here as long as you have playing for these guys, what does it mean to you to help them get to this point? And what is it about these guys that helped you stay afloat when times were tough this year?**

TIM ELKO: You know, it means the world that we were able to get Coach B a national championship here. The coaches, they teach us so much. They keep us in line. They're like friends to us, honestly. Obviously they're our coaches, but they're the best. They're the best there is. It's an absolute joy to play for them.

It's a joy just to go to the field every day and practice and be around them. I couldn't have asked for a better coach, head coach, hitting coach, pitching coach, all of the coaches. I couldn't have asked for better ones to play for for five years. It brings joy to my heart to win a national championship for them.

**Q. Talk to me about what was going through your heads in the bottom of the eighth inning.**

JACOB GONZALEZ: Kind of knew we were going to start the scoring, either in the eighth or the ninth. That's just how we are. We're going to put the pressure on. We're not just going to strike out on the -- like strike out the side and sit down. We're going to fight. And luckily I got a hit, and I finally got to help the team out this week. I'm just glad I got to help out.

Then everyone else had great at-bats to get us those runs.

TIM ELKO: I knew Gonzo was going to get a hit. I knew it the whole time. Nice, Gonzo.

**Q. Tim, Mike has been joking all month about the statue. Where do you want it?**

TIM ELKO: I don't really want one. I kind of just want one of all of us holding the National Championship trophy. That's all I want.

**Q. Tim, I want to ask you, what does Ole Miss mean to you? Obviously you've been here a long time. Now that it's all said and done, what do you want your lasting legacy to be on this place?**

TIM ELKO: Ole Miss means the world to me. I had to make a decision last year what I was going to do, and I remember following the draft I was praying and trying to figure out what I was going to do, and God told me that I'm not done here at Ole Miss. I listened to that, and I was like, all right, well, let's do this thing then.

I came back, and it was the best decision I could have ever made. It was a crazy road to get where we are, but I remember after we lost to Mississippi State at home, I called my sister in the car, and she knew that obviously we were struggling, and it was kind of taking a little bit of a toll on me.

I remember talking to her, and she just said, you've got just to trust God. He didn't bring you back here for no reason. I remember hanging up the phone, and I was praying out loud, talking to God, and just asking Him, what's going on here? What did I come back here? This isn't going how I thought it was going to go.

I remember just hearing one word that He was telling me in the back of my head, and it was "believe." That's all He was telling me, was believe, believe, believe. I was like, all right. I'm going to believe. I'm going to believe. I'm going to do it.

I tried to harp on that to the guys and keep the spirits up, and boy, was God right. We just had to keep believing, man, and we kept believing and fighting. We won a national championship for Ole Miss and all the past players and all the fans across the country and for the state of Mississippi and the University of Mississippi. We did it. We're national champs.

**Q. Mike, we've talked before about Hunter and his composure and demeanor and everything. Has any of that changed with the games? They keep getting bigger and bigger every time he gets the ball. What do you see in his routine and how he approaches those things?**

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, he's amazing. I think we mentioned it after his last start, there's young guys -- it's more than talent. There's guys that throw harder, there's guys that get better breaking balls, guys that have better changeups, and that's not trying to demean his abilities. He's obviously very talented.

But I think if you ask any of the coaches, his toughness, his belief, to be able to make pitches. We saw that through SEC play, but once we got to postseason, you watch him in Miami, I mentioned, where we had bases loaded. You're playing a national seed on their park -- or in their park, on their field. They don't lose there. Then he has bases loaded in the first and gets out of it.

That's kind of what he's done all year.

Then you watch him go to Hattiesburg and play in a tough, tough environment there, and pitches his best game of the year and gets to Omaha. The talent just continues, the

hotter teams are there. He just continues -- the bigger the stage, the better he gets.

When you watch enough sports like you have and I have, that's what the great ones do. When the stage gets big and the importance of the game, that's when they really shine, and he's one of those guys.

**Q. I know for you every group that you have is special, but this one in particular. Just talk about your emotions and what this particular group of guys means for you after they won a national championship.**

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, it's hard to put into words, to be honest. Game ends, and a lot of hugs and a lot of Gatorade and a lot of interviews out there. Everybody is asking about your emotions, and it's tough.

This team -- and you've listened to them and interviewed them. What a neat job I have to be around these guys. I mean it. Just great kids, great representatives of our university. They play this game at a very, very high level. They're just good guys.

We've had great leadership, as I mentioned earlier, and just to watch them do this -- I shared with them, and I said it several times now, life is tough, and there's bad things that happen to everybody. Good people, bad things happen. These guys have worked really hard, and I think they've showed a lot of people that you can fall down, you can stumble and you can fail, but that doesn't mean you're a failure. If you continue to work hard, you continue to push and you continue to believe, as Tim said, you can accomplish anything.

That's not some poster or some tweet to motivate you. We've all heard that. These guys have lived that this season. They really have. They've fallen down, where not a lot of people believed that they were any good anymore, and a lot of people may have been disappointed in them.

And I get that. It's sports, and that's part of it. But they didn't let that affect them. They continued to believe in one another. They continued to push.

I think that's why you had 20,000-plus fans show up here, because this is a special group. They knew it was a special group. It wasn't just a national championship. I honestly believe that.

During the trophy presentation, when you look in the stands, the stadium holds 25,000, and it looked almost still packed. That's how many fans we had here.

This group of young men, I think people have fallen in love

with them, their story and where they come from. They had a lot of people rooting for them, and not just Ole Miss fans. I can't -- I've gotten so many texts over the last couple weeks from a lot of our rivals, a lot of the people that we compete against every single day that says they're pulling for us, that they've fallen in love with this story and these guys.

I'm just, again, as I said at the very beginning, very fortunate to have been a part of it and let those guys allow me to be on the ride with them.

**Q. I know you've been asked about your emotions a lot, but specifically when it comes to Tim, I know you've talked --**

MIKE BIANCO: That was why they were really long answers so we'd get out of the emotion questions.

**Q. When it comes to him, that was the last game you're going to coach him in. Has that set in at all?**

MIKE BIANCO: No, and I almost said something to you earlier. This is such a great time, I don't think anybody wants to think about it's the last time. I was going to say, man, that's kind of cruel.

I think you probably saw that from Tim's reaction. Like he hadn't even thought about that yet.

You're right, but I'll tell you -- this isn't what you asked, but I'll tell you this: I've never won a national championship, and so I've been a head coach, what, 25 years. So you've always lost the last game. You've always hoped that you would -- that you were going to win it and move on to the next round, step, whatever that was.

And so when you walk out on that field, which you've seen seven other teams do here, and you've got a bunch of young men 18 to 22 years old that are crying and knowing that this is the last game and this is how it's going to end that season, and some of them that will never put the uniform on again. They won't get the chance to play professional baseball. This is it and this is how it's going to end, nobody is prepared for that.

I've always struggled in that moment because I didn't have a speech prepared.

To end on a winning note, man, it's really neat. So they didn't have to go through that. They didn't have to be out there with all the hugs and the tears. Lord knows Tim and the other guys, they've been through that enough, so they deserve this.

**Q. Mike, Jacob had such a big day today. How has he handled the last couple weeks and then coming through as he did?**

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, he's a superstar. It's tough; baseball is a tough game. Sometimes you don't have a good weekend or a good game.

I grabbed him yesterday and told him, I said, take a deep breath, you're a superstar, you're going to be fine.

Part of the tough week is we faced some really good pitchers and some tough left-handers. A couple days against Arkansas, we faced Hagen Smith, freshman All-American, who Hagen, we weren't sure if he was getting tired or hitting a wall, and he pitched as well as he's pitched all year here a few days ago. And then the Taylor kid pitched twice against us, and his opponents' batting average is under .100, so it's not just Jacob or Graham, nobody hits him. It's kind of been some bad matchups for him.

But he's terrific, and we're glad he's on our team.

**Q. Can you put into words what this pitching staff has done this past month, how they've kind of put it all together?**

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, and they deserve a lot of credit. I think when you look back statistically, it's a team game, and we have a great offense, but we are not in Omaha, and we're certainly not winning a national championship if we don't pitch it like we have. The guys have been terrific.

I think Brandon was right; once DeLucia became the ace that he did, you're a different team. When you don't have an ace, it's hard to win, and especially in our league. Friday nights are a bear in the SEC, and if you don't have a guy that can match up with the other team's ace, you have no shot.

I think once that happened, and then Hunter came along and kind of filled in that 2 slot, we had a pretty good one-two punch similar to last year.

Again, I think that also helped the bullpen to kind of solidify some of those pieces. You saw even today how electric Brandon Johnson can be. It's almost a shame that if he -- if we would have had a better year and a different season how great his season would have been, because man, he's about as good as anybody at the back end.

But we've had to use him in so many different ways, and then you look in the postseason, we've hit and we've scored and we've kept the score down, where -- this may

be -- is this the only save opportunity? Was this the only save opportunity? How about that, to win the national championship, and this may be the only time he got a save. Maybe. Well, close. If it's not, it's close.

So the point is, wow, there's been times where he didn't pitch a weekend. We won a super regional and didn't use our closer. Wow. So it's been hard on him not running out there. Not emotionally, but the regimen of a closer running out there and getting hot and pitching.

So I was a little worried. We pitched him with a 10-run lead because I was so worried, like we got to get him on the mound so he can throw. Again, the next time he pitches is the national championship game.

**Q. A lot has been made of Oklahoma's style of play. Of course yesterday you guys hit all those home runs, but today in the eighth inning it seemed like that hit and run was a crucial moment. Can you take us through the thought process there and what do you think that did for this team to jump start it?**

MIKE BIANCO: It really wasn't a hit and run. It was a steal by McCants, and Bench poked a little line drive to right. But we knew, or at least I felt, we got our best base stealer on base, top of the lineup coming up with two outs. I think most baseball minds say, man, you're going to have to pick a pitch here and go, try to get him in scoring position. If he gets thrown out, then you've got the top of the lineup at the bottom of the ninth and you try to tie it up or maybe get a walk-off.

To be honest with you, that even pushed -- I'm sitting there thinking we have not had a walk-off the entire season. That's another one, can you imagine how many times somebody won the national championship and not had a walk-off win. So maybe we're going to do it in the bottom of the ninth in the national championship game.

So when they brought in the closer, we grabbed TJ and said, hey, you go whenever you want, but we're going to pick a pitch and give you a steal no matter what.

After the first breaking ball we chose to steal, Bench gets a hit because he's allowed to swing with the guy in motion, we get first to third, and then as Chase said, I know it hasn't been a great week -- it hasn't been an awful week for Jacob, it hasn't been a great week. But we weren't going to steal Bench. He's going to have a lot of room on the right side to hit a ball. I felt really good at that point where we were that we were going to win.

**Q. Mississippi State won last year. Does Ole Miss winning this year add any fuel to the rivalry?**

MIKE BIANCO: From Sports Illustrated Kids we get that question? Wow, man, put you on the spot.

I'm sure it will. I'm sure our fan base will be very proud. I'll leave it at that.

But I will say this, and this seems maybe too nice for your question. But when we won in Hattiesburg at the super regional, I got a text from Chris Lemonis, the head coach at Mississippi State, and I got a text from Coach Gautreau, their hitting coach, both of them: Congratulations, good luck in Omaha.

And my response back to both of them was: Thanks so much, I really appreciate it, and we're hoping to keep the trophy in Mississippi.

As we're leaving Hattiesburg, Mississippi, that was a national seed that hosted a super regional. The rivalry is great, but it's a rivalry with all three of us because all three of us have great baseball programs.

**Q. The squeeze play, I believe it was in the sixth inning, what did you see, and --**

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, thank God for the Jumbotron, huh? Geez. Yeah, I was frustrated because I went out the pitch before and knew that they would safety squeeze or thought they would safety squeeze, so we went and made sure everybody knew what they were supposed to do. Terrific bunt by their lead-off guy.

Hunter being left-handed made the play much more difficult for him. He throws the ball, and of course another bunt play in this World Series that looks like we're going to screw up, and the ball goes in, and we give up the run.

And as I just by chance, because I don't look at the Jumbotron a lot, I just looked up, not because of that, and I went, my gosh, he's out of the running lane. So that's why I ran on the field. It's so loud, usually you can yell to the umpire, but you can't hear anything out there. I ran out there because I didn't want a pitch to be thrown or you're done.

Yeah, give that to the scoreboard -- credit goes to the scoreboard guy.

**Q. For a guy like Gaddis to get those four crucial outs for you guys, deferred medical school to come to Ole Miss, how important was that and how crucial has he been since you brought him in?**

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, he's been terrific, and like a lot of



the arms that are really good, we struggled to find roles. We've struggled to define roles and figure it out, and you've seen it all year. We thought he had a tremendous fall. We thought he was going to be one of the three guys on the weekend. And once we got into conference play, that was tough. And then he had an appendectomy, and like a lot of things that have happened through that month of April.

But he's just a tough kid, just a great kid. How about that? Kid was going to go to medical school a year ago and said, hey, I had a pretty good year, I want to try to go to Omaha, and he picks Ole Miss and he gets to win in the national championship game. That's another really cool story.

**Q. I think it was on selection day or after Coral Gables, you told us that in the postseason the key is obviously you have to have your stars come through, but it's also about the other guys. And throughout the postseason we've seen Calvin Harris and McCants and Garrett Wood and Jack Dougherty and Gaddis have these moments. Can you talk about those guys?**

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, I've always -- you're right, I've always believed -- tournament play is so tough, and to win at the end of the season, your stars have to show up. They've got to perform on a stage, and certainly our guys have.

But to win and to move on, you need the guys that maybe nobody was expecting. On media day they weren't the guys that were in all the photo shoots and all of that.

Again, they don't have to be the MVP of the tournament. Sometimes they are, but you've got to have different pieces or different ones on different nights. Calvin Harris was a superstar here in Omaha. Gaddis was terrific, a guy that hadn't started in a while and gives us that great start against Arkansas, gives us an opportunity, and then comes in today in a tough situation with the bases loaded -- we had already walked in, and he gets to a three-ball count and gets out of it. And so many other guys.

That's how you get here, because it takes all of them. You just can't -- you've got to lean on your stars, but man, you need the other parts to come through for you.

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