

2023 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 15, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Tennessee Volunteers

Coach Tony Vitello

Jared Dickey

Camden Sewell

Press Conference



it. It was like, oh, we saved them all towards the end of the year. So we kind of used that motto and ran with that.

TONY VITELLO: Hmm. I didn't think it was funny.

(Chuckling.)

Q. Jared, you guys have been known to hit the long ball. How do you think that plays in this park?

JARED DICKEY: I mean, if it plays the way it did today, then I would say we're in pretty good shape. It was flying out to all parts of the field.

We've also got some pretty strong guys on the team, so that probably helps a little bit. If it plays like it did today, then I would say we're in a good spot.

Q. You've had a roller coaster of a season. You've won 15 of 16 games at one point in the season and got swept in a series after that. Right now you're on a hot streak, winning five of the last six all on the road. How are you guys aiming to keep this hot streak up, and is there anything in particular you guys are doing as like superstitions or maybe just practice habits to try and keep this up?

JARED DICKEY: I wouldn't really call it a hot streak. I would just kind of say we're playing good baseball right now. That's what this team is capable of.

Like I said, finally coming together as a team, it's allowed us to be comfortable with each other on and off the field, and it's allowed us to just mesh together and know that we've got each other's backs no matter where we're at.

CAMDEN SEWELL: The main thing for us was still being together as a group and getting the opportunity to come together every day to the field, or whatever it may be, travel. Be together and spend more time together, and we're excited to keep it rolling.

Q. Both guys, can you just talk about what it's like to play for a coach like Tony Vitello?

THE MODERATOR: Welcome to the Tennessee news conference. Congratulations on getting here this year, Tony. Give us an overview.

TONY VITELLO: Thank you. I think kids, fans, media members, players, anyone would crawl through glass, or whatever phrase you want to use, to get here in any way, shape, or form.

It was certainly a challenging road for us and late hours in Hattiesburg. They did a great job of hosting the super regional as best they could, but lightning interfered with a lot.

The boys have been road-weary, but once you get here, the adrenaline spikes up immediately. You're just taken aback at how well it's run and also how well it's attended. So our guys I think are back to full strength energy-wise, and the next thing will be to manage it as best they can as we kind of wait our turn to play Saturday night.

THE MODERATOR: We'll open it up now for questions.

Q. Jared and Camden, all season it was talked about how bad your road record is. How did that kind of change in the postseason where you've had to go on the road so much?

JARED DICKEY: I think down the stretch we kind of just decided it's what we've got to do if we want to go all the way. So just having that mindset and coming together as a team, I think it helped us a lot.

CAMDEN SEWELL: I think building off of what Jared is saying, it kind of came to a point where honestly it got to the point in the season where we kind of made jokes about

THE MODERATOR: Camden.

CAMDEN SEWELL: Yeah, I don't know who listens to this or whatever, but, I mean, I played for him long enough to even be here, five years now, if that says anything about how much I love playing for this guy. Can't put it into words.

If you are a younger athlete, if you want someone who loves to compete with you, loves to push you, loves everything, this is the guy you want to play for.

JARED DICKEY: There's really not much else you can say. Camden pretty much just covered it. He has your back on and off the field.

He is going to do everything he can for you baseball-wise and just life-wise. He has helped me more than I could ever describe. So it's definitely awesome.

Q. This one is for Camden. You mentioned the experience you got playing under Coach Vitello, and you've had a ton of experience pitching. You pitched in the CWS in 2021. You pitched in the super regionals in 2022. This year you had four strike-outs against Charlotte, three against Southern Miss coming in in relief. How have you used the experience in past years to help yourself and your game along this year on this run?

CAMDEN SEWELL: To be honest, this go-around it's kind of unique because everything I've kind of used or picked up on that helps me, I kind of relay it to the younger guys as much as I can, the AJ Russells, the guys that I think are going to be pretty special and already are.

So that's the thing for me. Just everything I learned, pick up on, to kind of relay that information the best I can and do whatever I can to help the younger guys and the guys that are going to continue to build this program.

Q. Camden, can you kind of talk about what you learned last year being the No. 1 team losing in the super regional and what you kind of brought to the team this year with that?

CAMDEN SEWELL: Oh, yeah, I mean, honestly, last year wasn't how everyone wanted it to end, but I think everything that happened last year kind of put the stepping stones together, whatever you want to call it, for this year and to kind of deal with the adversity and everything that came with it.

And we have dealt with a lot of adversity this year, but we're coming together at the right time. So that's what

we're excited for.

Q. Camden, this one for you, and then one for both you and Jared. You have the distinction potentially of being the first Tennessee Vol to ever play in two College World Series. What does that mean to you? For both of you, how pivotal was that first game, second half of the season, that Friday night game against Vanderbilt? What did that mean? How pivotal was it to what you guys have done since then?

CAMDEN SEWELL: To the first part of that, I didn't even know that, so that's pretty cool. But the other part, I think the Vanderbilt game, honestly, a lot of people considered it like a swinging point in our season, but at that point we were just trying to get a win. That did kind of turn everything around.

A lot of people say that one game like that is how a season turns around, and you don't point it out, but looking back on it, that was probably the game that kind of turned everything around.

JARED DICKEY: Yeah, I mean, for sure. I don't want you to hear this, but I'll say it anyway. We were kind of sitting in the locker room and looking at each other like: We're 5-10 in the SEC.

And that was pretty much all that we said. We just knew something had to flip.

Like I said, finally came together during that Friday night game, and it was just awesome. From that point on it was a really fun experience. Hopefully we can just keep it going.

Q. For Camden and Jared, I wanted to ask your opinion on that 2021 team. There's kind of been a common theme of maybe that team not handling the moment as well as it could have or the same way that you all did throughout that season. What needs to happen to make sure that you all don't get outside of yourselves on the big stage this time around?

THE MODERATOR: Camden.

CAMDEN SEWELL: Yeah, I think enjoying the moment and enjoying the environment and everything that's going on, but still focus on the task at hand and not get too caught up in all the outside activities and everything like that. That's kind of the approach that I feel like needs to be taken this time versus last go-around.

JARED DICKEY: I don't think there's really anything different than the regional that we played or the super



regional that we played being here. We're still playing baseball, so I think we just go out there and attack every task with conviction, and we'll be fine.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, you're excused. We'll open it up now for questions.

Q. Who is your starting pitcher tomorrow?

TONY VITELLO: (Laughing) well, Frank is not sitting here. You know, we've just kind of gone with our routine. I think one time everyone went crazy because I got asked in our local media setup similar to this, and I said, well, we're about to practice, and then we'll finalize it.

Anytime we've done that, I don't like saying something and then -- there's no tomfoolery or anything like that, but we've rolled with what really has got us to this point with Andrew Lindsey first and Dollander second and Beam third.

Burnsy has been incredible out of the bullpen with his stuff and ability to get outs, but he has kind of changed our team's mentality a little bit too with the emotion he pitches with and having fun out there again as an athlete, but also he gives our guys confidence that the back end of the game is one that we feel like we can win each time we go out.

Q. Between your 2021, 2022, 2023 teams, which one has kind of taught you the most?

TONY VITELLO: Which one is the most close together?

Q. Which one has taught you the most.

TONY VITELLO: Oh, taught the most. This one, hands-down. It's been interesting. It didn't quite work out this way because the 2020 year was so crazy. I'm not saying it -- because it's easy to say you were good in 2020 because it never -- we didn't play any SEC games, but there's a lot of people within the program that think that was the most talented group.

You would have liked to keep climbing, keep climbing. Eventually you get to a point where you can't say we're better this year than we were last year. It's kind of trying to create a standard and uphold it.

This year to follow last year's act and all the stuff that came with it and just a lot of other mini-stories along the way, it's been a ton. I have repeatedly said it to where anyone listening probably thinks we're whining. We got an unbelievable coaching staff that has stuck together and been loyal. We're blessed with talent. There's multiple guys that throw 100. It's not like we don't have the ability

to get to a place like this, but the journey we took was about as zigzaggy or curvy or windy as it can get.

Maybe it's helped us in the long run because I don't feel like we've reached our full potential. Now, if that's the case, you better find in a hurry because there's only so many days left, even for the national champion.

Just for our program's sake, our fans' sake, the construction with the stadium, how many kind of different little adversity stories I could tell you about this year, there's been a lot wrapped into one. It's a big old Chipotle burrito of stuff that's gone on this year. Been beneficial, though, in the long run.

Q. You talked about the zigzaggy of the season. I think one thing that might exemplify that, you guys swept Vandy the week after you got swept by Arkansas, so definitely a lot of ups and downs in this campaign. So how important do you think that getting consistency in order to reach that potential that you talk about? How important do you think that getting that consistency is, and how are you and your staff planning on helping these players get to that?

TONY VITELLO: Sure. I think a little bit of that is that's a microcosm of the league. There's a lot of teams that could tell that story of one weekend it was great, they were exhilarating, and the next weekend it felt like your season is coming to an end. Mississippi probably would have described that a couple of different times last year.

So our league is like that, and then our team has been like that this year. And I think what I want to answer your question with, whether it's directly to your -- specific to your question, I should say, or not, is just there was so much tinkering going on.

Maybe that's my fault. Maybe it's the players' fault. But guys in the cage adjusting swings, new lineup every day, where does this guy go in the bullpen, what are we going to do with Camden? Andrew Lindsey is supposed to be our closer; well, we don't have any save opportunities.

There was just all this tinkering, and I think eventually we decided to go with a few different things that were going to be our specific approach day in and day out, whether it be the lineup or the defense we wanted to roll with.

Eventually it settled in. These kids are young. They want to come to the park and know what's expected of them.

It takes two to tango. Part of it was our fault; part of it was theirs. The whole first half of the season had a lot of juggling and trying to figure thing out. There's been a lot

more consistency from the coaches and the players together. We've kind of come together and done it as a group.

Q. Tony, I think probably a lot of people presume that Skenes will pitch against you tomorrow. First go-around against him, he is pretty solid against you like he was against everybody, it seems like. What can you take from that game, the last time you saw him, as far as taking it into this game?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, he was more than solid. The one thing when you face a guy like Grice at Clemson, I'm glad our hitters had a better mentality than I did in the dugout because there were moments of doubt.

You have to just keep playing, and I've been fortunate enough to coach some pitchers, and some of them have also been pitchers we've faced where you can see the other dugout kind of deflate.

The series was not our best effort, but the kids did keep kind of pushing forward in that series, and it was early, but it was one of the first signs of, okay, we got a little bit of the fight that we want in our program.

We finished that weekend off very well on Sunday, but if you date back to Friday or Game 1 of that deal, Skenes was better than us. And I think there's probably some info in there that we can pull out, and the guys can take some confidence in maybe we've seen him once before.

He is probably a different pitcher now than he was then. It's probably a different LSU team in some areas. I mean, they still have Mr. Crews and all that. We're a different team too.

You want to have some preparation going into the deal and see what will be similar from that weekend and maybe try and get a head start on what could be different, but I also feel like this is a place where you don't know what's going to happen.

Just like our last weekend, lightning, pitching changes, expect chaos and embrace it during the postseason. This group has done that very, very well. Maybe it's those struggles that we had early on that built us for that.

Q. Your dad has always seemed to push you in a lot of ways throughout all your years of coaching. What has he meant to you in your coaching career, and especially maybe this season with all the adversity you have faced?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, you know, I think for me the

players get out there. When you talk about being in Omaha, all of a sudden you can look up and be like, holy cow, there's big crowds in the SEC, but this is a big crowd.

Then this is also the park you're dreaming of playing in. Well, if you have a good foundation of work ethic and things you've done in the weight room and preparation and all that, it should be easy to take a deep breath and say just go do it.

For me I'm young and I have to lean on Coach Anderson a lot and still kind of trying to find my way. But when there are moments of difficulty or we need to try something new, I think the foundation I got just from being around him every day is the most beneficial.

That doesn't mean in a season like this his encouragement or maybe his words to the guys or cracking a joke at maybe a valuable time doesn't carry some weight, but I really just feel like the foundation in general is one that is strong.

I'm not saying it about myself, but it's kind of the old house thing. Like, you want to have a house that's got a good foundation, and the rest is kind of icing on the cake. So for me, again, being around him all those years, he can say stuff to me now, and sometimes it's needed. Sometimes it's not because maybe it's after a loss where you don't want to talk or something like that, but I can hear that voice right now.

Anything he is going to say, I've heard about every version of it in different varying tones, and all beneficial.

Q. You had a ton of veteran leadership graduate off of last year's team. Who have you seen kind of step up and become a leader on this one?

TONY VITELLO: Zane Denton just with him coming out of his shell. It's been awesome. When you come to the park, some of it's a little too choreographed at times, but you want some personality.

You can stick some gum on a guy's hat or just shenanigans, whatever you want to call it. I think him getting new to our program and then some of the adversity he faced in his first year with us kind of had him bottled up a little bit.

Now just him being himself shows the other guys, well, that's kind of what we need to be to be the best team, is just everybody kind of be who they are and kind of let your light shine, to use that cliché. So he has taken on a bigger leadership role than I thought he would.

Griffin Merritt and Jared Dickey have been great because they're older. They're guys in the middle of the order that are looked to. So those are two guys that stand out to me, but you could kind of go up and down the lineup. It's a young group, as you mentioned, so everybody kind of had to contribute a little bit.

Then on the pitching side of things, again, Lindsey and Burns kind of taking on different roles. They showed our guys how to start a series with competitiveness and how to end a game or end a series with competitiveness.

Q. How do you balance with your roster right now everything that is Omaha, the pageantry, the crowds, everything going on, but also, hey, we have to go out there and play some games? How much do you rely on guys like Camden to kind of help you out in that regard?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, Camden, he said it up here. I'm glad he did. He has become a mentor. And I'm close with the kid, so no offense, but I never thought he would be a mentor (laughing).

I thought he would be a really good pitcher for us right out of the gate, and he has put together one of the best careers, as John mentioned. It could be pretty interesting if he makes an appearance here or a landmark appearance, and he has helped.

To be honest with you, last time the way we advanced here and the downtime we had between -- you could even throw out there was no opening ceremony like we'll have tonight. There was no celebration because it was so close to 2020. I don't even want to say the word.

There was too much downtime, and there was too much media and hype, the Daddy hat stuff. I think it became a distraction. It kind of took most of the attention of our guys instead of just focusing on the game.

This time around I think the guys are just trying to get some rest. We got done in Hattiesburg at midnight. They probably went to bed at 3:00, 4:00 in the morning just by nature of adrenaline. We fly out the next morning, and then we fly here about 18, 20 hours later. They're probably just trying to get back to neutral and enjoy this thing. It's probably moving a lot faster.

I think the nature of the schedule could benefit us this go-around.

Q. I wanted to ask you kind of about that 2021 team as well. You can correct me if I'm wrong, but there's been times since then you kind of alluded to the stage

maybe getting the best of them within those games. You just talked about that to a certain extent, but do you have a different approach in terms of the message to the guys entering these two games to make sure that they stay within themselves and just try to keep it to playing baseball?

TONY VITELLO: I don't. I think, like anything, I kept mentioning Game 3 against Southern Miss, they were too hyped up. It was good that they were hyped up, as you should be in that situation, but they kind of needed to relax a little bit.

I don't have the magic thermometer to tell exactly what's going on with the team, but if we see stuff, we'll point it out.

Otherwise, again, the schedule throughout the whole season of 56 games and the SEC tournament, that did our job for us. That's, again -- there's great conferences out there, you know, but the SEC kind of beats it into you, out of you, however you want to phrase it, that you go through that stuff and it prepares you.

But I think that 2021 group will tell you, Liam Spence and Fergie and Russell aren't scared of anything, but I think they kind of locked up. Instead of staying true to themselves, they were not, and it hurt us a little bit in that particular case.

Different team, different time, different schedule.

Q. When the season started, I know that you had mentioned that it was a learning process in terms of chemistry with this team and everyone coming together. How would you say that that's really developed throughout the postseason and specifically the last two weekends in the NCAA tournament?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, it's gone from -- I don't know what's a faraway place -- Bali all the way to the United States of America. It's as long of a trip as you can imagine.

In August it was weird. Even though we lost in the supers, we did play late into the summer or at least halfway through the summer. Some of those guys stuck around the facility and prepared for pro ball because the draft is later.

So all of a sudden it went from Camden Sewells and Drew Gilberts and Evan Russells, guys that were like extra coaches, they were staples of the program, to all these new guys. It got real weird real fast.

I think the coaches were far apart from the players. The players were far apart from one another. There was just a



lot of sorting out that needed to be done.

By the end of the fall we played Memphis in front of a massive crowd down in the west side of the state that was great for our program, but it was great for the coaches because it was the first day we were, like, these guys have come a long way in the first semester.

But then you have to start back over in January and the standards and expectations are higher. So we started where we ended off in the fall, but it needed to go further.

Again, I would like to say that to me we're still working on what is the best version of ourselves, but we're much further along than we had been at any point in the season.

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