

# 2023 Men's College World Series

Saturday, June 17, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Tennessee Volunteers

Coach Tony Vitello

Griffin Merritt

Hunter Ensley

Postgame Press Conference



**Skenes can throw so hard and Gavin is a little slower?**

HUNTER ENSLEY: Obviously it's a little bit of adjustment, but that's the game of baseball, just make adjustments on the go. But I mean, we looked at the scouting report on the guy that was coming in. He was a heavy breaking ball guy. So kind of set my sights on a breaking ball, and got a good pitch to hit.

**Q. Griffin, what was difficult about hitting Paul Skenes tonight?**

GRIFFIN MERRITT: The guy has four pitches that he can throw for strikes. And everybody sees the velocity. And that doesn't help when you're at the plate. But his ability to locate pitches and his ability to mix pitches, 2-0 is not an automatic fastball down the middle.

He's able to spin the ball well and he's able to locate. He doesn't miss over the plate a whole lot. You combine that with just the arm talent that he has and the pitch repertoire that he has and he gets to be a pretty tough at-bat.

**Q. 14 strikeouts offensively. What's the mindset for you guys to come in on Monday against Quinn Mathews from Stanford and just limit the strikeout counts?**

HUNTER ENSLEY: Haven't really looked into anything about Stanford yet. But I think we just do what we did tonight, obviously. Had quite a bit of strikeouts, but a lot of positives to take from those at-bats.

Yeah, we're looking to Quinn Mathews tomorrow and get a game plan ready and attack that.

GRIFFIN MERRITT: Along that line, obviously strikeouts aren't good, but let's be realistic. The guy is probably going to break the all-time strikeout record for a given season. So give and take with that.

We'll just get back into our prep work and get ready for Stanford. And Matthews is a good arm and somebody else we'll have to prepare well for.

LSU - 6, Tennessee - 3

COACH VITELLO: I'm not good at the opening statement thing. We got beat tonight. I thought our guys played all nine innings. Maybe their coach could have managed the game a little bit better and put us in a better situation to find a way to win. But got the stat sheet here, the same one you guys got.

**Q. Did you hope to have, I guess, more success having seen Paul Skenes earlier in the year? And what went wrong offensively today?**

HUNTER ENSLEY: Obviously we were looking for more success. I mean, the more success, the more opportunities you have to win a ball game. But we new coming in, I mean, he has an unreal arm. I thought game prep was really good. All pre-game work was good building up to the game.

But, I mean, just wasn't able to get it done. I thought we had a lot of good at-bats, quality at-bats. Good fight in the box, but just not able to get it done.

GRIFFIN MERRITT: Obviously Paul's really good. There's no other way to put it. And he was on his game tonight. And he was executing his game plan. And when you face a guy like that you need a couple of breaks to go your way.

I think Hunter talked about it, we hit some balls at guys that when you're going up against a guy the caliber of Skenes you need those balls to fall. And some of those just hits just didn't get down for us today.

**Q. Hunter, you hit the home run right after they pulled Skenes. Was that a different adjustment because**



**Q. A loss is a loss at the end of the day, I suppose, but showing a little fight at the end clawing back through it at the end, is that something not to have to stew so much on over the next day and a half or so?**

GRIFFIN MERRITT: You have to take little victories. I was proud of the way we fought in the eighth and ninth inning. And it gives us a little bit of boost and momentum to have a good practice tomorrow and get our prep work in and get ready to play a good team on Monday.

HUNTER ENSLEY: Yeah, same thing, just I mean we always know offensively we're one inning away from a big inning and getting right back in the ball game. But I think we're pretty confident going into Monday and we've got a bullpen that's ready.

**Q. How much faith do you have with Chase Dollander in elimination games with what he's shown? And with the pitching staff you have left, does it give you confidence that you have a shot to get out of this side of the bracket?**

COACH VITELLO: I don't think we can do anything until, as Griff and Ensley pointed out, get out of bed and prepare. Monday will come when comes it does.

I want to see Drew Beam pitch again and so does Chase Dollander. And I think Gamer (phonetic) and I probably have as much confidence in that guy as anybody else on the staff. And one of the guys mentioned too we've got a bullpen that's basically has gotten us here.

So in combination with that and our position players getting after it, got plenty of faith in this group. If we were to lost faith about halfway through the year, we'd be recruiting for about two or three weeks by now.

**Q. What was different about the Paul Skenes your team faced today as opposed to when you saw him in March?**

COACH VITELLO: He threw backwards. Throws a hundred miles an hour and he threw backwards on our guys. From his end you're doing anything you can to advance in the situation in the bracket where you're in the winner's side. And he mixed it up.

And in order to do that effectively you've got to throw strikes and command your pitches. And he did that. I don't know what his changeup numbers are, and my angle is not that great. But I would imagine his changeup usage and strike percentage changeup-wise was as good as it's been all year. He was effective with his whole arsenal.

But there was a heavier mix, I think, than we expected. I think our guys recognized it right away but easier said than done adjusting on the fly in that situation. But the communication was good by the guys in the dugout what they were seeing.

**Q. Why didn't you throw Chase tonight versus choosing to throw him on Monday?**

COACH VITELLO: We just went with our rotation. That's been our rotation for the second half of the season, Lindsey, Doe and Beam. And we're fortunate enough that we've got a guy that people call our closer in Chase Burns but he's really a starter that we're fortunate enough to use in a bunch of different situations.

And there's a lot of other guys that contributed, too. I'm not sure where those numbers are. I only look at a couple different stats. But I think that group combined had as good as any ERA in the conference, I think, or at least up there.

**Q. What was your thoughts on how Andrew pitched tonight?**

COACH VITELLO: He was good. I mean, they did what you've got to do against a guy like Lindsey. He's a heavy ground-ball guy. He mixes well himself. They had the one big swing. I don't know what we did to Gavin, but he hates us.

And I'm only speaking in brevity, the best I can do. He's done well against us the four games we've played this year.

But other than that swing, they kind of just -- I don't want to say nickel and dime -- they took what they could get off of him and found some holes and were able to accumulate some things.

I'd love for you all to come over to the hotel and replay the game like a video game and make decisions, but when you're going on the fly there, we treated that situation where Combsy came in as almost like a ninth-inning type situation because, just to be frank, because of the guy that we were facing on their side of things. But I thought he threw the ball good.

**Q. Your guys felt like they got ambushed the first time by Paul Skenes. Did you see that tonight at the plate?**

COACH VITELLO: I didn't. No one throw a water bottle on me or anything. I've never played here. The shadows are a deal. We've got a kid from Arkansas, that Oregon State game and other situations.

So I think that was a little bit of extra battle on top of a guy that's already got a great arsenal. And, again, the fact he was mixing caused our guys to need to make an adjustment a little bit.

But the whole package there, they played some good defense behind him. The whole package was them making a bunch of plays and pitches and our guys having to keep fighting without getting a reward to show for it the first five or six innings.

Eventually the pitch count got high so you have a positive you have to rely on. I don't feel the guy -- maybe I'm saying the wrong thing -- but from my standpoint I don't feel he bum-rushed us. He was just better on most of the occasions that he was up there.

**Q. Is it tougher these days -- guys have so much data on where pitches are and guys can know the zone, and just seems like there's so much more access to stuff. Is it harder to get guys to extend their zone now offensively than it used to be? Because it seems like if it's going to be off the plate a little bit throughout the night, is it tough to get guys to adjust to that?**

COACH VITELLO: Dude, I'd like to coach the game on Monday or at least be over there in the dugout.

I think the TrackMan deal has just changed the game because that data is there and everybody sees it. So you kind of want to know what the game is so you can try and win the game and you accumulate that data as best you can and attack in certain situations.

I think what you're saying is if guys got to adjust on the fly, can they do that. And that's the part of the game. I mean, Hunter is a smart kid. He said it. It's a game of adapting and adjusting on the fly. You have to kind of see what's out there.

And there are certain days, in Hattiesburg, part of winning the game is dealing with lightning delay. Sometimes the ball's carrying. Sometimes it's not. So there's a bunch of different battles going on within trying to put a ball in play off a pitcher, our guy trying to throw a pitch and locate it.

You've got to do whatever you can to get it done. Not the most eloquent answer, but the best I can do. I did get a degree.

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