

# 2023 Men's College World Series

Tuesday, June 20, 2023

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Tennessee Volunteers

Coach Tony Vitello

Drew Beam

AJ Russell

Postgame Press Conference



LSU - 5, Tennessee - 0

COACH VITELLO: We didn't play very well tonight. LSU did. Both teams made mistakes but they capitalized. So ultimately that's on my shoulders, whether it's in the middle of the game or pre-game for our guys to play better.

But this thing's already over with, and in my mind in the past, a game I'll choose to remember this team by was yesterday. It was the last great moment we had together. And it was also a game that was very representative of how the season went.

Started out slow. A lot of struggles in there, a lot of frustration. But guys overcoming that and working together, coming together to make sure we have success. And that's what occurred. So that's what I'll remember it by.

And as far as the whole team goes, much was made about preseason rankings with this particular group. I think guys like Drew and others helped kind of get our program to a new category. And no disrespect to any writers or anything like that. We certainly had a lot of talent.

But I didn't think we deserved to be where we were at the beginning of the season. I let them know that. Just a lot of new faces. A lot of things that we had to replace, and we did that by the end of the year, in my opinion.

I know we won't be one of the last two teams standing, because number two was our highest preseason ranking, but we kind of challenged these guys to actually become that. And maybe we are at least top five or somewhere in that category again -- no disrespect to anybody else.

So that's what I'll remember this team for. And our program needs to get better. But this was a group that helped our program improve, no question, and did some things that others have never done.

**Q. Drew, what will you remember the most about this season and this team?**

DREW BEAM: I mean, I think the thing I'll remember the most is probably the tough times we had and just the hills we had to climb. I mean, this season starts not just in February, it starts back in August when we get on campus in the fall. It's a grind. You go through so much with your teammates and coaches. And you figure things out, things don't work. You figure out something else.

I think just those trials and tribulations that were thrown at us that we had to fight through as the season went on, that's just the things you remember because you just push through it with your brothers, the guys besides you, the coaches besides you.

That's just the memorable part. The winning is great but making the bond and making it a family with the guys beside you is what you come out on top with.

**Q. Drew, sophomore year how do you think you improved in year two?**

DREW BEAM: We attacked the offseason. Obviously we want to be better every year. Just tried to be more precise, tried to take care of my body a little more than I did last year.

Really tried to step into being more of a leader on the team, showing the right ways for guys like AJ coming in, a freshman. He's stepped up in a big role. It's been fun seeing guys like that.

But I think just filling in my role as a guy on this team that can influence others, and I think that's just the biggest thing I've taken away this year.

**Q. AJ, how were you able to handle the emotions and kind of your first big-leverage postseason moment?**



## **And what did you have working for you?**

AJ RUSSELL: I thought everything was working pretty well. It was a short warm-up, but just going out there just trying to breathe and bring myself down to a normal heart rate and stuff like that. Really focused on breathing. And me and Cal and just kind of all worked out.

**Q. Drew, you've all had so many times this year where you came back late. You're able to keep fighting, keep fighting, make it happen. Did that help the mood at all throughout the game when things didn't start the way you wanted, and why maybe did it not maybe happen this time?**

DREW BEAM: Absolutely. I mean, that's a good ballclub over there. They've got a good team. But it was never out of reach. It didn't happen today. It's baseball. Just the way the tree falls sometimes.

So I don't think anybody ever had any doubt. We were just going out there playing the game we all love. It just didn't happen for us today.

**Q. From the dugout perspective, what were you seeing from Ackenhausen that he was unable to let you guys kind of get into the groove offensively?**

COACH VITELLO: His stuff has always been difficult to hit. Usually where it's kind of -- he's not on my team so I'm going off a little bit of video, a little bit of research -- where it's kind of gone awry with him is with command.

He had excellent command at the start of the game. Then as the game went on a little bit, there were some mistakes he made out of the zone, whether it be hit by pitch or something like that, but then he kept his composure, regathered and did well.

It takes two to tango. Like I said, we didn't capitalize on mistakes as well as they did. And we kind of had it down. He got in on lefties and got righties to kind of overswing a little bit. It kind of depends on which side of the deal you're talking there.

And you look at game plan or you can just look at a guy who had a good opportunity and really took advantage of it, it wasn't going to be an easy day to score runs. Nothing to show for it.

For our team, a lot of times when it was tough out of the gate, we just needed one thing to happen and then it kind of came. Not necessarily like an avalanche, who knows, maybe we get that one little moment, things are different. But we did not.

**Q. Did you feel like you guys pressed offensively at all as the game went on?**

COACH VITELLO: I don't think so. I think there was more frustration at times than we've had as of late. Maybe a word I can't say up here or two -- like that. But that was just because guys were trying. And it was a tight game. So each pitch you could feel a little bit.

But certainly in pregame and at the start of the game there wasn't moments of tension. I referenced mistakes -- they really made us pay on walks. And then defensive mistakes.

Even when you don't feel that bond, everything was all good, and we make a mistake later and you knew the guy was going to come up to the plate. I was just dying somebody would be on base for him because you knew he was going to respond. That's just what he does.

**Q. I know you mentioned yesterday's game is the game you'll choose to remember this team by. But what do you want this team to be remembered for on the grand scheme?**

COACH VITELLO: You know, kind of what you fantasize being: If you claim to be a competitor, or if you compete at all, is that you'll get after it no matter what. And when you get knocked down, you'll get back up. When you get knocked down again, you'll get up even quicker and so on and so forth.

So I think it was a competitive group. They can hang their hat on the fact that -- we talk about perspective. There's a variety of tradition within each program. It takes a lot in our league to be able to brag about tradition. But for us, in particular, we wanted to get to a Regional and we wanted to have a roster that was really athletic that you guys would be excited to write about -- and COVID's whatever. And we wanted to get here and we didn't win any games.

Then we wanted to get here and win a game. And this group did it. I skipped a year. But boys are part of '22, give it a couple of years and you'll get yours, no national championship, but pretty special group that would be remembered by everybody in this room for a lot of stuff. Love them or hate them. I love them.

**Q. You said earlier the program needs to get better. I'm curious where you see that being needed, and then also, as you said, getting here, winning a game, do you feel like you've advanced the trajectory of the program?**

COACH VITELLO: I think so. You need to get here. You need to fill it out. Doesn't mean like Coastal Carolina can't come here and win a national championship, but you've got to get used to the itinerary, the media attention, the stage, and things will be passed down by guys.

We had some tough dudes on that '21 team. They kind of locked up a little bit that first game. We also faced a guy named Abbott. I wasn't too happy when I saw that video when we found out who we were going to face.

But you've got to learn how to deal with rankings and expectations and then people start looking forward to playing you as opposed to maybe sleeping on you a little bit. There's a variety of circumstances. And we want our stadium to get bigger. We want our crowds to keep getting bigger and rowdier. We want our roster to be as competitive as anybody's. Of course, that will come and go a little bit. But to be able to handle things with shooting for a national championship every year.

**Q. Wanted to get your vantage point on two plays, first being Maui's double and holding Cal up at third and following half inning on the bunt single that Zane turned right field?**

COACH VITELLO: Coach E had a difficult challenge yesterday because there was one play where you just got to send the guy and make them play catch, and the wind keeps blowing the ball in and they do it.

Then he's got to send the other guy. And Zane, gosh, love him, he kind of got his feet tangled up a little bit and made it closer than maybe it should have. Then you get another difficult decision there.

Normally with two outs and a double you've got to -- but it wasn't there. And if you look at the Jumbotron to double-check it wasn't there. And we've got a good hitter coming up next who had a heck of a night. The first time we played these guys and just a little bit of difficulty tonight.

To your second question, it looked like it was going foul. But I'm also standing in the dugout spitting seeds into the ground. He's out there playing in front of 25,000 or whatever we've got in there and he's trying to make a play.

And who knows? It may not have rolled foul. But then again to try and make a play. I mean, "put it in your back pocket" is easy to say if you're watching from home, but these kids are running around out there pouring their hearts out onto the field. That's why it's been so damn entertaining so far, if I can say that word.

**Q. Your teams in the last three to four years have**

**played with such emotion and passion. I think it's contagious around the sport of college baseball. These games have been so entertaining this week. Can you talk about the state of college baseball and maybe where your program is kind of playing a role in a lot of the emotion and passion we're seeing this week?**

COACH VITELLO: I appreciate you saying that more than you know. It means a lot. I think last year's team, what I was going on a tangent about or ready to go on a tangent, they got people talking about the sport -- big leaguers, all kinds of people.

And, again, part of it was they didn't like me or our players or anything like that or we did some foolish things or we did some great things, but it got people talking.

And we're not the only ones. I think these indoor facilities these kids train at, they're putting in more work. Media, whether it be social media, or now all these games are covered, all those things are elevating the play and the amount of passion these kids pour into this thing.

And I think our sport -- I'm prejudice -- but I think our sport more than any other collegiate sport has more momentum and is on a greater incline than any other. And this thing here has become an absolute party in Omaha. They do a good job hosting it.

But the trajectory is not going to slow down. And this thing had a lot of star power. Maybe more star power than any other one at this. You guys would know better than I.

So why can't next year have even more star power? Having said that, hopefully Florida is not here. But that big old first baseman though would probably be a good guy to have around here. But we've got a couple, too, though.

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