

2024 Men's College World Series

Friday, June 14, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Virginia Cavaliers

Coach Brian O'Connor

Griff O'Ferrall

Evan Blanco

Postgame Press Conference



North Carolina - 3, Virginia - 2

BRIAN O'CONNOR: I'll just start, great college baseball game. Evenly matched. They just did a little bit more of the little things than we did.

Really proud of Evan Blanco. I thought he pitched a terrific ball game. Cook had a great approach against him there to drive in their second run with two outs. And just really, really proud of Evan. You can see why we started him in the opener. He had a fantastic day and was ready to pitch, and managed some situations and gave us an opportunity to win.

Certainly North Carolina's pitching is good. They went to two of their best relievers, for sure. And we didn't make enough of an adjustment. I think we left 10 runners on base and just couldn't capitalize, runners on second and third, no outs, and only got one run to show for it on Griff O'Ferrall's fly ball to center field. Just couldn't get anything going to have a multiple-run inning.

I thought Henry Ford squared up some balls. Certainly the wind blowing in played a factor for both teams, not just for us.

We're disappointed. We're frustrated because we just don't believe that we played a very good baseball game today -- not to take anything away from North Carolina. They pitched very, very well.

What I'm speaking of is just some little things, some missed signs. We're really good with dirt-ball reads at first base, and we missed three opportunities in the game today to get a runner to second base. Those are things we've done great all year long. And they just didn't show up

today.

That's on me as the leader. My responsibility is to make sure that they're prepared for the fine details. I spoke about it in the opening press conference. At this time of the year it's the margins. Your margin for error is so small, and you've got to be on top of everything to win in Omaha.

We weren't today, but to North Carolina's credit, they were enough and won the ball game.

Q. Griff, you were in this situation last year. What will be the key to extending the season past Sunday this time?

GRIFF O'FERRALL: Not letting the moment get too big. Not looking at games ahead, I think that's the biggest thing. The only thing we can control is winning the next game. So just taking it one at a time.

Like Coach said, we need to do the small details that got us here in the first place. If we can control what we can control, take it one game at a time, then we'll have a shot to get back into it.

Q. Evan, how did you feel like you settled in after that first inning? And what kind of kept you going all the way into the seventh again?

EVAN BLANCO: I felt I settled in well. Even the first two, three innings I didn't feel I had my best stuff. Then I finally hit a groove and kind of lost it in the back half of the game. I'm overall happy with how I did.

We played great defense the majority of the game, the whole game, actually. So it was definitely a collective effort for my performance.

Q. Evan and Griff, tough one out there. Really good baseball game. How do you guys bounce back in the locker room with the mental aspect of getting ready for the next game now?

GRIFF O'FERRALL: Kind of like just what I was talking about before, when you get down 0-1 in a tournament like



this, it's pretty easy to look down the road, look at games that you have no control over.

I think the main thing, we're not going to go in there and try and hype everyone back up where everyone is very excited to be here. We'll be super focused. But locking back in on the small things that we can control. And that's kind of the (indiscernible).

Q. Evan, in that seventh inning, the at-bat against Cook, what were you seeing in that at-bat? That was the last one before you left the game?

EVAN BLANCO: Credit to him, two doubles on the day against me. He put a great swing on a poorly executed pitch. I definitely could have gotten it a little bit lower, but credit goes to him.

Q. What is the chemistry between you and Jacob this season? And how do you feel about what lies ahead until Sunday to play 27 in?

EVAN BLANCO: Me and him have developed a great relationship through the whole year. At the beginning of the season Ethan Anderson was catching me for the majority of it. But as the season has gone on, me and Jacob have gotten more comfortable and gotten close on and off the field.

Q. Griff, what made Pence tough for you guys today late in the game?

GRIFF O'FERRALL: He's got a really good high-spin fastball. Like Coach mentioned, we didn't make an adjustment based off the field, especially today. If you hit the ball in the air, it was an out.

We didn't make an adjustment. We knew that after the first couple of innings and we kept hitting the ball in the air. Even if it was barrelled it wasn't going anywhere. It was not a quick enough adjustment for us.

Q. Just the decision there for the pitch to Honeycutt there at the end?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: It was the right match-up. I'll tell you, Cook, I think, is their best hitter in the lineup. So it wasn't an option for us to walk Honeycutt. Honeycutt's a great player. He has a lot of home runs. But I felt we had handled him really good all day.

And the guy on deck had had a terrific day. Actually when they played in Charlottesville, I actually intentionally walked Cook because I have so much respect for him as a hitter. I just think he has a really good balanced approach and hits

the ball to all fields.

When Hungate was able to get the nine hole out, to pop up, there was no decision for me who to go to. Honeycutt is a fantastic player, one of the great players in this country. But that was the best match-up was to try to get him to hit a ball on the ground.

And unfortunately Hungate fell behind in the count and hung a slider there a little bit too much. And Honeycutt did a really nice job with it.

Q. Your offense was so prolific during the regular season. The numbers have dipped in postseason. Is that mainly a product of just facing better pitching, or are your hitters not doing some of the things --

BRIAN O'CONNOR: I think it's a combination of things. One, the pitching this time of the year is so good. I mean, everybody is, whether it's Regional, Super Regional or Omaha, the teams are there because they have good pitching. The teams that don't have good pitching, they're at home.

So naturally this time of the year, the runs are going to be harder to come by for sure. That happened to us last year here in Omaha. They weren't real high-scoring games, and most of the times here in Omaha they're low scoring games. And there's a combination of things.

That said, I just don't think that our approach in some situations -- early on in the game we took too many fastballs off DeCaro, and we're better than that. That's an identity of our offense.

Like I said, the dirt-ball reads, things like that that we need to be better at, we've been great all year. But mainly it's the pitching.

Hey, listen, North Carolina's got a great offense, too. They've got one of the top offenses in the country as well, and it was a low-scoring game. So I think everybody pretty much feels that way.

We just couldn't -- they walked a fair amount of our guys, or hit us. We got a lot of free 90s. We just couldn't get enough big, clutch hits with guys in scoring position. And again that's a credit to their level of pitching.

Q. After Evan got Honeycutt out in the seventh inning were you thinking the left-on-left match-up against Cook was the right one and Evan had earned that right to try to get out --

BRIAN O'CONNOR: 100 percent, there was no way I was

not going to take Evan Blanco out of the game to face Cook. I know he had two hits off of him, but Evan Blanco is our guy. And he had earned that opportunity.

And a great hitter in Cook. He put a good swing on the on the ball. Evan, I'll have to go back and watch the pitch -- I'm not sure if he executed it or not; but that's neither here nor there.

It was absolutely the right match-up. And our plan, no matter what happened, was to go to Hungate the next batter.

Q. Harrison Didawick comes out of the game. Is he injured at all? He's thrown like that a little bit all year. Is there anything wrong with him or his arm?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: No, there's not. I'll certainly see what's going on with him. That was just a defense decision on my part. We just can't -- again, that throw puts another guy in scoring position. It didn't end up costing us the game because we managed it.

But he's better than that and he knows that. And so it was a situation that I needed to do.

As the visiting team, you all know that I did the same thing up in Boston this year as well, as the visiting team. The home team's a little bit different. And it's just one of those situations that we needed to make that move.

Q. How do you feel about going into Sunday with the amount of depth you have in your bullpen now and playing North Carolina back in April, taking them two out of three, what's the sequence of what you saw in April until today?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: I don't think what I saw in April has much to do with today because we both played a lot of ball games.

That weekend series in Charlottesville was very much a high-scoring series. There was a lot of offense in entire series. We were fortunate to be really offensive that weekend, and we had a great game against DeCaro and didn't today. And he battled. Pence is outstanding at the end of the game, but in my opinion, DeCaro won that game. I know he only went four innings, but for him to manage some of those situations where he was walking us or hitting us and not allow a big hit to break it open was huge. We just couldn't get a crooked number.

And the pitching, yeah, sure, we only used two guys this time of the year -- in today's ball game. In Omaha, it's so different because you don't play tomorrow. And guys get a

chance to get rejuvenated and things like that. It's going to be important -- whoever we play on Sunday, it's going to be important that we get off to a good start.

But again it's us getting locked into what we do and be more opportunistic. We were not opportunistic today. We had a lot of opportunities with multiple runners in scoring position and just couldn't get a big hit.

A lot of them were fly balls that would have been fly balls on any day, other than a couple that Henry Ford hit. I thought he squared him up. I thought he drove the baseball and it just died and didn't reward him.

But on a day like today, like Griff said, you have to make an adjustment as an offensive ballclub and it's got to be more line drives.

Anything in the air just isn't -- you're not going to hit it over anybody's head. And we just didn't make that adjustment, and we need to work on that tomorrow at practice and make that adjustment and be ready to go on Sunday.

Q. You guys played a really strong baseball game today, but like you said, sometimes little things don't go your way. What's the message to your guys going forward on the brink of elimination?

BRIAN O'CONNOR: Be better. Be better, period. End of story. Unacceptable. That's not Virginia baseball.

Again, not going to take anything away from North Carolina. They've got a great club and they got the big hits and they pitched really great, okay?

But what I'm talking about is the small details. Every coach sits up here and talks about it this time of the year. They did it and we didn't. So, period, end of story. We have to be better. And if we're better, then we'll have an opportunity to win and potentially move forward.

Our last three ball games here in Omaha last year and this year and every year is different, we've lost by one run and they've been very low-scoring games. The message is be better.

And I know what these kids are made of. They've bounced back all year long, and I know that they'll be better on Sunday.

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