

# 2024 Men's College World Series

Wednesday, June 19, 2024  
Omaha, Nebraska, USA

## Tennessee Volunteers Coach Tony Vitello Zander Sechrist Blake Burke

Postgame Press Conference

Tennessee - 7, Florida State - 2

TONY VITELLO: I'm still trying to grasp what happened. We got hustle and bustle there with you all putting on three games. Thank goodness it's going fairly well. Three games in one day is tough.

But heck of a time in Omaha. And us being the sandwich game, it's one of the weirdest games I've ever been a part of. Maybe we came out of the winning end because we have one of the weirdest pitchers I've ever around in Zander. And he threw the ball really well and led us into the battle the way he should.

But both teams struck a bunch of balls very well. Both teams made great defensive plays. And both teams have explosive lineups that leave you on the edge of your seat, at least where I was standing. So hopefully the fans felt that way too and got their money's worth.

And if you were a Florida State fan you obviously got your money's worth all year long, in particular the year that it was for them, remembering a legend as their former coach.

**Q. Blake, could you walk us through the double play that got you out of the third inning?**

BLAKE BURKE: Was that the one where I stepped on the bag and threw it over?

**Q. Yeah.**

BLAKE BURKE: Honestly, I've had a couple of those plays this year where I messed up by hitting the runner throwing to second. He gets on me about clearing the lane. I touched the base, threw it over, had a lane. And Zane was



there to tag him out.

**Q. Did you think you had enough time before the run was going to score, when it happened last?**

BLAKE BURKE: I have no clue.

**Q. Zander, to (indiscernible) with six and third innings striking out of three batters with the 25 FSU batters you faced that you faced of the FSU offense. What was the chemistry you and Stark had that got you clicking on all cylinders?**

ZANDER SECHRIST: Watching some of the games that FSU was playing I knew they were going to be aggressive. And they're obviously an aggressive offense throughout. They're loaded throughout.

I noticed that. We're going to attack and if they swing first pitch, they swing first pitch. Stark and I we talk a lot but not too much. It's more during the game that we talk and figure out stuff. Overall great dude. And I'm glad we got the win today.

**Q. What was it like facing this Tennessee lineup back in the fall?**

ZANDER SECHRIST: I mean, speechless, I guess. I mean, I remember in the fall World Series, it was kind of like that. C-Mo took me over the wall at the Smokies Stadium. And facing Burke, we like to joke that one person has each other each day. He either goes 2-for-2 or I get him out twice. It was a little bit in between. You have Billy there, a Clemson transfer, he's a threat.

We're just loaded throughout the lineup. And obviously it prepares you for moments like this, especially with FSU's lineup. You think back to the fall and how you got, for example, how I got Burke out or Billy out. And you just put that forth and compete with what you've got.

**Q. Zander, I guess this would be the second consecutive game you've all had a center fielder just try to run through the wall. When you're on the mound, I'm sure you want to win anyway, but does that**



## **put a little juice in you?**

ZANDER SECHRIST: K.T.'s catch set the tone, especially in the first inning. I know our offense scored in the top of the first, but he set the tone right there.

Dingus hit a good ball -- or Dingus, however you say his name; it's hard. But he put a good swing on it. Hit it a thousand miles an hour out there. But K.T. running into the wall kind of set the tone today.

TONY VITELLO: Don't say his name wrong. He'll rip you in half.

ZANDER SECHRIST: There's one guy that we won't talk about.

**Q. Walk us through the pitch if you could on that home run. I know you've been barreling up a couple got that one elevated. What was that pitch and what were you looking for?**

BLAKE BURKE: First couple of pitches he threw me a couple of fastballs, and then a change-up and then out of nowhere threw that slider. It was nasty, a back foot slider. I told him, good pitch.

I did that just so I could get it again because I knew it was coming. I fouled a fastball off and I kind of knew that pitch was coming. I was prepared for it. I got my barrel on it.

**Q. After getting close the last few years, what's the emotions like for you in now getting a chance to take this team into the championship series?**

TONY VITELLO: It's kind of hard. There's a lot of hustle and bustle, like I said, after the game. And then also you want to manage it as well as you can.

What's interesting, the position we put ourselves in, Kirby, Snead, Combs and there's others, but those have been -- our main three guys are fresh as a daisy -- if you're watching tombstone.

And Zander is just throwing the heck out of it and got a really low pitch count. Just kind of want to always make sure I'm doing my part in putting these guys in a good position to succeed.

But Zander wouldn't let you take the ball out of his hand today. We decided to utilize those guys.

That's where my head's at, I guess. It's not a great answer. But it is cool to see a cultivation of just like Burke's development and Kirby being a mainstay of this

program and Zander, his contribution.

We always say before something happens, something happens. There's been a lot of build-up into the successes we've had this year and the failures, too, to be honest with you. And it's been fun to be a part of.

As far as my emotions, I'm kind of at the point where I'm just following these guys. There are certain tasks I have to do, and there's direction I give them, and they'll listen. But kind of following them right now. Makes it nice.

**Q. You talk about the game being weird, but just how significant was getting out of that third inning unscathed? And how kind of peculiar was that sequence?**

TONY VITELLO: It was nuts. I'm not even quite sure what happened on Dean's play. He made such a good play. He made a great first step -- on the ball he made an error on he made a great first step, too. It was almost too good. He was moving so fast. And what happened happened.

But he put himself in a great position to go to option A or option B, and you always think option A is protecting home plate. And the next play, just an outstanding job by Zander of keeping his composure.

And as much as we'd like to take back either a couple of errors, we did give up a few free bases, which is not necessarily -- I guess one. Guys played really good defense. K.T.'s catch was incredible.

There's an exclamation point on, I think, you guys are the ones that asked me earlier in the year, can he play center field.

Jordan Beck did it, too. A coach tells you you can't do something and you need to bow up. You need to be respectful to the coach, but you need to bow up to the situation. And he's been a maniac in the outfield during BP.

I grew up watching Willie McGee, and he was so good defensively. But if you went to BP it all started there. He treated BP like a game. That's how K.T. is. And he can play any of three spots as well as anybody I feel in our conference, at least what I know well, maybe even the country.

**Q. The third inning that Dean made and the play that Blake made. You talk about maturity, are those the type of plays that a mature baseball team makes this time of year?**

TONY VITELLO: Dean will give you a smirk and there are a few things that go in the freshman category, but he's oddly mature for his age and physically mature too.

But by this point in the season, you should kind of be a sophomore if you're a freshman. And I don't know how many postseason games Blake has been a part of as well as others. And even Zander didn't get to pitch here last year. But he's seen so many of them and now been a part of them, too, it benefits you.

You can do something for the first time and still have success. But I think there's some contributions there, for sure, of our guys relying on the past to be mature and have experience and know what to do in different situations.

But the other thing is, too, I'm very blessed with a support staff that's insanely good. We've stuck together regardless of what goes on -- good, bad. Maybe I'll make a snide comment here and there, but we've stuck together and incredibly close. And from my standpoint why we're close is because I want to win.

And I think we do have success because of those guys. And in turn these players, this group of players will listen as well as -- I can't think of a group that compares to it. They'll listen as well as anyone.

So that to me is mature, taking direction even though you are an experienced player, you're really talented or whatever it might be. And I feel like the guys giving direction are really good.

**Q. Careers and seasons with everybody evolving and taking turns and all that stuff, the past four or five starts for Sechrist have been big spots with something on the line and they have all been good. At what point did you think he couldn't be just a weekend guy but be this kind of guy?**

TONY VITELLO: I think when -- Blake mentioned he's made some mistakes on a particular play. And he bounces back. And I wanted to answer for him there. The homer came after an at-bat where he had a guy at third base and one out. And that's pretty dang good spot for Blake Burke to be in.

Having said that, if you go back, Oxford might have thrown his very best three pitches all in one at-bat to Blake. But to me I think he hit the ball so hard the next AB because he was determined to have a bounce-back at-bat.

And I think Zander being frustrated with me a couple different times where he came out of the game earlier than he should have, again, you bow up.

I've never had a day in my life where Zander is anywhere close to being disrespectful to me, but there's a way you do it on the field where you show this is what I can do. And the old actions speak louder than words.

I think there's many examples with this team. I mentioned it with K.T.'s defense, too, where if it doesn't go as well as the guys want -- Nate Snead was not in the top five or six guys in the fall. He was very unhappy. He showed it on his face. We talked about it, and he went to work. And I think that's a big part of where we're at right now.

**Q. Going back to the preseason or even in the fall, did you anticipate this team having the power numbers that they have?**

TONY VITELLO: No, but I don't know that I've applied myself in that manner. Coach Elander will because it's near and dear to his heart. He knows how to do it. He works on it with the guys. But it's never a huge stressor. Look at today, how many home runs could you argue or hit on a day where the wind is blowing out, we're playing in a smaller park. Sometimes it doesn't happen for you the way you want. But we knew our guys would take consistently good swings. We knew they were very physical, and we knew we'd have some depth.

And Reese didn't have the best day today, but it's kind of nice being able to put Ensley in that DH spot and feel good about it.

**Q. After the sixth inning, Zander had 66 pitches and Florida State's guy 120. It was similar to what happened against North Carolina the other night. I'm curious how much you think the pitch selection, the way you guys work counts has contributed to the success hitting all season but especially here?**

TONY VITELLO: It's another thing, I mean, I don't know where we stack up with walk totals and stuff like that. It's not necessarily stressed, but it is stressed to have competitive at-bats throughout. If you take pitches off, you may get away with it in your at-bat or your day may look good on the box score, but maybe you're hurting the guys behind you.

Some of those at-bats were not necessarily productive, again, on the stat sheet. But I do think, when everyone in the lineup hooks it up, then it just makes everybody better.

Sum greater than the parts is the cliché I used the other day. I think it fits with this group, in particular. It's really fun -- I'm staring now the top of the order was really good today. But as I've said before, there's parts of the year

where it's more just middle, the bottom, and it alternates, and again it makes it a headache for the other team. Kind of like they were for us, up and down the lineup. Alex hits that homer and Cantu did as well. It's nice to have that weapon on offense.

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