

2024 Men's College World Series

Monday, June 24, 2024

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Tennessee Volunteers

Coach Tony Vitello

Zander Sechrist

Dylan Dreiling

Hunter Ensley

Postgame Press Conference



Tennessee - 6, Texas A&M - 5

TONY VITELLO: Very surreal. Hard to center yourself, which is a good thing, being lost in the moment, I guess. Nothing too intelligent to say other than the first thing to say is I hope the fans that have turned this into an insane party, insane event, got the series that they wanted and that they deserved.

It clearly could have been either team's trophy tonight. So congrats to Texas A&M. I mean, you cross paths with players in Hoover and just on the field. And, in particular, some of their mainstays are just incredibly cool guys.

And then also I was given an opportunity to experience something different, the University of Missouri. So I owe a thank you to that coach at Texas A&M who did a phenomenal job and made an incredible hire this year, too. So congrats to Coach Schlossnagle and Texas A&M and their fans that have always kind of blown my mind ever since I was at Missouri.

We went to a football game there, and it was unbelievable. Everybody was pretty friendly until Brad Smith did his thing. But Texas A&M's definitely won their fair share of football games.

Enough rambling. No better team to win for the University of Tennessee than a bunch of guys who were truly the definition of a team. And no better play for our program to, I think, be the winning run on that slide, a guy that's just built with a ton of grit. And his teammates follow his leadership. And it's a great example of how this group got things done.

Q. Hunter, can you take us through the slide?

HUNTER ENSLEY: I know K.T. really hit that ball hard. You could probably say I was assuming it a little bit, at the very beginning off the bat, that I thought he got enough of it. Peaked in. Saw that it stayed in. It took a really good bounce right to LaViolette.

When I saw that I knew I had to get on my horse. Dean was pretty much telling me outside, outside, outside. And the throw actually ended up carrying the guy to the outside.

Just natural instinct trying to make a play right there and get back on the inside part of the bag. And just was able to avoid the tag right there, and ended up being a pretty big run.

Q. Dylan, walk me through the big at-bat. In everything that was going on in your head, seeing that ball fly out the way it did, and the reaction from your teammates and coaches, the moment overall for you?

DYLAN DREILING: I kind of blacked out again in that moment. I know first pitch I overswung on a heater way up. And then I kind of just told myself, I said, "Just see the ball deep and just put a good swing on something." He threw me a change-up over the middle, and I just almost tried to be late on it to stay back, and put a good swing on it.

Q. Zander, could you get in to you and Kirby and what you guys have been through together and for you both to play key roles in this game, what that means?

ZANDER SECHRIST: Just surreal. I mean, that guy has been here for five years in this program, and it's basically come from the ground up. I was blessed to get an opportunity to play here for the last four years, along with the guy next to me as well.

And Coach V said it earlier, just grit. We had unfinished business, especially this being the third time we've been here in the last four years. '21 we didn't do well. '22 you could arguably say that was the best college baseball team



ever. '23 we got to experience winning at least a game here, but the job wasn't finished. And '24 just felt a little different. And I'm just blessed today get the job done.

Q. Zander, when Tony gives you ball, whether that be the third game of the series, third game of the weekend, whatever that might be, how much confidence has he instilled in you over your years at Tennessee, even just your time even going back maybe your senior year of high school when you're being recruited or whatnot? Just your thoughts on Tony Vitello and the journey you guys have been on?

ZANDER SECHRIST: That's a long list right there but I guess I gotta say good things since he's sitting right there. But the man's like a father figure, to be honest. I was blessed enough to have him recruit me. Growing up in a single-mother household and talking to this man mostly every day and every week, he was just like a father figure to me.

I went on my recruiting visits and I bought a hat here in the alumni Vol shop. I go back home and I realize that out of all the recruiting visits, the only thing I bought was a Tennessee hat.

It just felt like home. I'm glad that we finally, finally got it done. I couldn't be more happier for this program and the way it's been built. And I see Danny White back there, so I'm going to put it out there: I hope there's a lifetime contract coming soon for Coach Vitello.

Q. There's been a lot of talk tonight about grit or blue-collar. And just how have you tried to embody that in the program and bring those kinds of players to Knoxville to get a moment like this one?

TONY VITELLO: I think we've tried to build a support staff that kind of has that image. I mean, when we first came to Knoxville, you were looking at, came from Arkansas, arguably the best fans in the league and best stadium, huge crowds, winning tradition.

Florida has got in-state players. Vandy has their niche going on. Mississippi State's facility is incredible. Coach Bianco turned that thing into a monster. LSU's tradition as good as if not better than everybody's. So how were we going to compete? That was our answer when we had that long conversation.

We had to start filling in the people we wanted to hire. And fortunately there were some good baseball people that left the program, but we had a clean slate. So the people that we brought in, we wanted them to be self-made people. I talked about it. Frank started out on laundry down at

Howard Junior College.

(Lost audio) the best guy in Quentin Eberhardt. And the administration was very frustrated with me. We got hired, I think, in July. We did not hire a strength coach until late October, I believe. And it was just taking our time, making sure we got the right guy who fit those things.

If you look at the NCAA rules, no one is going to spend more time around your players than your strength coach. Academic coordinator and trainer are probably second and third. And like I said, might be the best hire out of that whole deal, even though Frank and Josh are obviously incredible.

And we've sprinkled in guys that have played in our program. In our first year, Ross Kivett gets thrown out. And I'm in there being an idiot, too, and we probably all just looked like idiots.

But we kind of had a theme going there that we needed to find a way to make this thing work. And that freight train got going, and it never really slowed down until it really got out of control, to be honest with you.

But that was our niche. We got to play with some attitude. We gotta play with some grit. And we're going to have to get some guys that maybe don't want to say yes to a school with a better winning record than us. And guys like that, like C-Mo and some others with some attitude, have done a lot for this program.

Q. When you look at the support from other staff members at Tennessee, other coaches who make the trip, people who ring up your phone and text you and blowing you up at night, what does that say about the University of Tennessee and what you guys have built collectively with this baseball program, especially the way it's headed now, the new stadium and your lifetime contract, according to Zander, and whatnot?

TONY VITELLO: My brain is not working. You guys have a job to do so I try to say things that will help you on that, and then it gets thrown back on me. I got a good text message last night by a non-Tennessee fan.

I brought up Texas A&M because we went down there and played and it was going on at a couple of other ballparks in the Big 12 too. But this is what I want.

I was a little kid. And to that magnitude is what I saw De Smet High School, the packed gymnasiums and the basketball games and it's so hot in there and it's full and everyone's going crazy. I like that unity.

That's why I'm a music fan and you are too. You go to concerts and everyone knows the words. I love unity. And that's why to me this was the perfect team to have won, which I was trying to say in a little better words because they were so close and the definition of unity.

And my wish came true. Again, I remember that being as a player. I was talking to Ryan Rallo, who was here tonight. Look at these people and what are these chants they're talking about? Now I get to live that out.

I did that as an assistant at Arkansas, because Coach Van Horn gave me that opportunity, and also helped lead me along the way.

The one thing I'd like to say, and I think some of them appreciate I hustled around down there. And most of them hate me, which is fine. But what they need to realize is their program definitely had a hand in what happened tonight. There's no question about that.

So I'm thankful for my personal opportunity. But guys like Zander and Dylan are benefactors of who I think is the best coach in the country in Coach Van Horn, is who I'm talking about.

But Tennessee came calling, and I knew a little bit about it. I knew it had those ingredients. But I've been blown away by how friendly everybody is, how involved everybody is. And loyalty is a very important word to everybody, but especially to an Italian fella, and I don't know that there's a more loyal fan base and really just community when you're in that state.

Q. The other night you talked a little bit about how you said college baseball has become kind of a monster and really growing. What does this series, with two teams that have never played in this series before, giving fans such a great series mean to the sport for years to come? And where do you think the sport going down the road?

TONY VITELLO: It's got to drag more people into this thing.

The crowds were insane. I don't know who had more people or who were more loud. But they are two fan bases that are always hungry for wins but, because like you said, they hadn't been here before, it kind of sets the stage for what's going to happen in the future.

Unfortunately, some of the rules mean the rich get richer. But everybody's got an opportunity to get in the tournament and advance here, and you've had programs like Gary Gilmore's Coastal Carolina do their thing.

But I think there's going to be a parity there. And a reporter asked already about winning down the road. And it's like, this league and the ACC, who was represented here, and some of these programs are going to be built up because of the portal and other things that go on. You better be ready to take your lumps, because you hopefully can dish some out, but you're certainly going to take some as well.

Again just the star power. One of you all used that word last year with guys like Dylan Crews and some of these other fellas. Insane talent that you're able to come watch at this level. Hopefully that answered that question.

Q. You mentioned playing with attitude and grit, how that had to be a recipe for Tennessee. The fact that you guys are Tennessee, a huge institution with all kinds of athletic history and success, and that had to be your recipe to get here and to get to this point and get over in the SEC, what does that itself say about the league about the SEC and how deep it is and how difficult it is to win in this sport and other sports too?

TONY VITELLO: It's literally insanity. I said it on the field again, not very intelligently, but I would rather just be me. I honestly don't like phony conversations. You go to a restaurant and the waiter's got the voice. They change -- hey, how can I help you? I don't want to be somebody I'm not.

We have nemeses we play against and all that, but honestly I've got more respect for the coaches in this league than you can ever imagine or print into words.

And then you add in the guys who have families and do this, I honestly can't comprehend how you can juggle both of those things because that's all I can do.

Coach Heupel and Coach Barnes, their sports are the same. It was good to see them. You have to lean on other people to survive this thing because it is a monster and the traditions are so deep.

You did mention, our university -- no sympathy. We've got all the resources in the world with where we're at, but it's a place where we kind of had to build a foundation to catch up with, again, some of these other storied programs.

And I don't think you ever -- I guess Coach Saban would argue -- but you don't ever get to a point where you can look down on everybody because the instant you do that, you're probably going to take an upper cut from one if not multiple places.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

