

2026 Men's College World Series

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Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Ole Miss Rebels

Coach Mike Bianco

Hunter Elliott

Will Furniss

Taylor Rabe

Press Conference



through some ups and downs since then. It feels like ages ago, almost, that we were here. So you forget a little bit. I don't know, it was just good. It was just a lot of excitement to be back. Really love this group of guys. Really happy for everybody that's getting to experience it.

And yeah, it brought back a lot of good memories.

Q. Taylor, first season on the whole that hasn't been involved with injury or affected you in some ways. What's this rise been like as your role has increased throughout the season?

TAYLOR RABE: It's been fun. Like coming into the season I knew I was going to be able to do everything that we wanted to do in the offseason and in the preseason and the fall to get ready for the season. I knew I was going to get an opportunity to have a big impact. So I was glad that I was able to do that and help us win.

Q. Could you guys kind of talk to the overall strength, obviously, of the SEC and getting five teams in this thing? Are you glad to be on the other side of the bracket from the All-SEC to get a little break from seeing all the same old people?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: Yeah, we could talk a little bit about it. Yeah, I think it's why there's so many teams here is because the league and the schedule that you have is just -- it's so brutal and so tough. The road environments you go to. Man, they're hard. There's no off weeks. It doesn't matter who you're playing in the league, 1 through 16, they'll walk into your stadium and beat you.

And I think that's exactly like I said, that's why there's so many teams here because it prepares you for postseason. I'm not going to say I'm glad to be on the other side of it. North Carolina, Troy, West Virginia, incredible ball clubs, have had incredible seasons. So I'm not going to say that.

WILL FURNISS: For sure. What he said.

Q. Hunter, any wisdom you've imparted upon these guys about what it takes to be here and pitch at the big moments? And then, Taylor, anything that you've

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Ole Miss coach Mike Bianco and student-athletes Hunter Elliott, Will Furniss and Taylor Rabe.

MIKE BIANCO: I think like everybody, you get to this point and you're excited to be here. It's obviously a long journey for every program to make it to Omaha, the pinnacle of college baseball. But then once you get here, travel and all the media obligations that they just went through, I know they're excited and ready to play baseball.

Q. Will, I was wondering, have you gotten a chance to kind of connect with your dad about finally making it to Omaha and what that's like, and if you don't mind speaking a little to how he's meant to you in this process?

WILL FURNISS: I got to go see him for a little bit after we won in Auburn. He got here yesterday. I'm about to go eat lunch with him now and just going to have him walk me through what it feels like to be here, how to handle the excitement with the nerves and everything.

And then he's done everything for me to get me here, and he's the reason that I got to even come to Ole Miss. So I owe everything to him.

Q. Hunter, what were the emotions for you taking the field yesterday, and then obviously today knowing what those were like four years ago when you walked off this field?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: I've told a couple people that I feel like you forget a little bit about it. It's been a while. I've been



taken from Hunter this season to kind of build yourself up and be ready for the postseason?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: No real like getting the guys together and letting them know, hey I've been here so this is what you need to do. That's not really what I've done. They've asked some questions, and it's more, man, just having success here is about doing what we did in Lincoln, doing what we did in Auburn, just winning the big parts of the game, doing the same thing.

And I think that's why maybe sometimes people come here and aren't the same is because they try to play a little different, it's a bigger stage or whatever. But no, it's doing what we've done all year. That's why we're here, so we're good enough to have success here.

TAYLOR RABE: I think when I first came here as a freshman and met Hunter, I kind of looked to him for the answers how to get to Omaha. I don't necessarily think that you learn that by coming here, but I think that, kind of like he said, that one thing I've kind of learned from him is that the trait of a really good team is that you don't really -- win or lose, if you get swept or if you sweep someone, you don't try to change everything up or do anything very different. You just stick with your process and continue to try to improve the things that you need to improve and be the same guys every day.

So I think that's something that Hunter's kind of taught me and that I look for in the teams, and when we had some struggles this year, I just tried to keep the morale. Like, we don't need to panic. We're still a really good team. And especially in our league, people get beat every week, and that's not a reason to start to panic.

Q. Will, Ole Miss has faced one of the tougher paths in the NCAA Tournament to get to Omaha, going to the Lincoln regional, playing in Nebraska against their home crowd, and then playing in Auburn against two record-breaking crowds for the Tigers there. Offensively, it feels like you guys have added a little bit more of an element to gain leads early, and it's not necessarily using the long ball, because you guys know you can hit the ball very far, but talk about adding a little bit more contact to that lineup lately?

WILL FURNISS: Yeah, I think it's just kind of more -- I think hitters elevate their game in the postseason, not necessarily trying to, but just knowing that, like, forgetting and really just moving past bad ABs is huge for a lot of hitters, and it's really hard for people to do that. In the postseason, you kind of have to do that because for every AB could be the one that breaks the offense through and helps you win the game.

So, really, just a lot of people battling every pitch. We've just really wanted to get it done for our teammates, and we've gotten some runs in at the right time. I think we have a lot of runs scored with two outs, and runners in scoring position, where it seems like we're always finding the big hit.

Which it's really big for especially the postseason and the way these guys are throwing it, it's really -- you don't really have to score too much to win, which we want to score 20 runs every game and not make it a sweat. But while we're waiting to do that, we're just going to try to make sure we win every pitch and try to get runners in when they're getting in scoring position.

Q. Hunter, you were obviously here in 2022. Are there any similarities between this group and the group that won it back then?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, it's more similarities off the field. Obviously, on the field we've got great pitchers, we've got great hitters, things like that. But I think this group is one that's stuck together. This group's one that's a little older. We have a lot of experience, good, bad, both types of experience.

And the main thing, man, this group really loves to be together. We love hanging out. It's kind of been a thing this, whatever, postseason or whatever, but it's real. We like the bus rides because we get to spend time with our teammates.

We don't want to play the last game together. So that's a trait that I think is very similar.

Q. Hunter, kind of the same question I asked Taylor about him a little bit. What have you seen in his growth and what's allowed him to excel to the level he has this season?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: Yeah, the obvious stuff. He's made huge strides on the field. He's developed into one of the elite-stuff arms in the country.

But kind of outside of that, man, I think his competitiveness has elevated. The thing that, I don't know, maybe proud or whatever, the thing that I'm most impressed with him is he seems to really find a way to own the big moment now.

It seems like he's starting to understand that jams are just a part of it. You're going to get yourself into jams. But he's learning how to make the big pitch, and that's awesome. That's something that takes some guys a long time, but he's made some big pitches this year.

Q. Hunter, there's a similarity between this year and '22 in that you won your way here on the road. Yet at home you're known for big crowds and big atmosphere and everything. So is there a difference in the way that you and the team motivate yourself when you're at home versus on the road?

HUNTER ELLIOTT: I don't know about motivating ourselves. I think we're a very good road baseball team. I think the road experience we've gained this year playing in Austin, playing in Fayetteville, playing in Gainesville, I could go on and on, in the SEC, I think that's what's prepared us.

This team really enjoys kind of quieting road crowds. I think this team kind of enjoys the big moment, kind of enjoys the rise of the opposing fans, and then we really like quieting them. I'm not sure. I wouldn't think that it's going to be like that because Ole Miss fans travel pretty well here.

But no difference. We enjoy playing on the road, but, man, we love playing in front of our home fans too.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. This team all season has felt like they just don't shy away from the big moment, really mentally tough. Is there something that you and your staff do to kind of get these guys prepared for these big situations? Feels like you guys have just stepped up in the big ones this year.

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, I don't know if there's a secret sauce to that. Certainly don't want to take credit away from them. But I think one of the things that's been echoed a lot recently, but all coaches, you talk about culture, chemistry, whatever phrase you want to use, but when you have those teams that are close-knit, those teams that play for one another, those teams that have great leadership, they seem to be better in the bigger moments.

So I think it has more to do with that. The other thing is maybe a mantra, if you will, midway through the season, one of the pregame talks was about handling hard. Not just in baseball or in sports but in life in general, there's hard times. There's things -- there's difficult roads. And I think most people, the mindset is I need to get through this hard time so it will be easier, and that really doesn't happen.

The hard times don't stop, in sports or in life. You just learn to handle hard better. And so we kind of took that on about midway through the season.

People talked about our schedule. People talked about our SEC schedule. And we talked about handling hard well. It was kind of fitting that when we, at the end, didn't finish well enough to host and we were going to go on the road, that not only would we go to a place like Nebraska and a great crowd, but then we'd have to play a really good opponent in Arizona State, and our guys handled it. And the reward was to go to Auburn and play in front of two other record-breaking crowds against one of the best teams in the country. So this team's handled hard well.

Q. Have you and Joel talked about who you will throw out there tomorrow night?

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, we're going to throw Taylor Rabe.

Q. It's been a little bit of a roller coaster ride for the Ole Miss baseball program since 2022 in the national championship. Obviously, a couple years ago in a different spot. But the last two years, last year, you host a regional and this year you're in Omaha. Talk about the approach and process of wanting to get old and stay old, because I feel like that's been a little bit of an emphasis of yours in this program.

MIKE BIANCO: Well, we're believers. And I think most coaches would admit that not just in college baseball but certainly in our league, old wins.

Older teams seem to have success. They're more mature, to the earlier question of handling the tough moments. And so you look up again, and you've got veterans like Will and Hunter. Taylor, even though he's eligibility-wise a sophomore, he's been here for three years.

When you're old, you've been through the adversity. You've been punched in the mouth, and hopefully you've been able to get back up and continue to fight and have success.

So some of those teams, I think, when we came back from the 2022, that team, we lost a lot of old players, and it was tough to get that back.

But certainly this team is older and much better for it.

Q. Obviously the stats with Taylor kind of speak for themselves. What can you say about the job he's done mentally to make him a good fit to start Game 1 in Omaha?

MIKE BIANCO: I think what Hunter said, there's been a lot written about him over the last three weeks, and well-deserved. I mean, he's a kid that just continues to get

better, it seems, week in and week out. He was good at the beginning of the season, as you know. Whatever role we put him in, he seemed to flourish in, if it was just a bullpen piece, to the closer, to all of a sudden a weekend starter.

But if you watched him, and what Hunter said, the great ones learn how to make pitches and get off the field. And he's learned that. You've watched him, especially over the last few weeks, there's times in those games where this is where the game's likely to be won and lost. And he's been able to make those pitches, and that's what the great ones do.

Q. A lot is being made of Hunter Elliott's national championship experience. And he said that there's maybe not a moment where he steps aside and says, all right, guys, here's how we do it. But what's the value of Dom Decker's experience here last year?

MIKE BIANCO: I think both, both those guys. And yeah, I don't think it's a team meeting in the locker room where they pulled them together and said, okay, here's the roadmap to navigate through Omaha.

But I think -- and I would imagine as a player -- you're looking at Dom, you're looking at Hunter, and that's what leadership is a lot of times, just how they respond in those moments, what they're doing.

So, yes, a lot has been said about Hunter, and obviously it should be. He's a national champion. He's the last remaining guy off that team. But Dom was here last year. And so I think both guys have shown tremendous leadership, not just in the last week or so, but throughout the season.

Q. Could you talk a little bit about the strength of the SEC? Were you surprised five teams made it? That's a new record. And then also could you talk about what challenges North Carolina presents?

MIKE BIANCO: First, probably sounds pompous, but I'm not surprised. We were here in '22. There was four teams, and two of the other four that weren't SEC teams were Texas and Oklahoma.

So in our league, as Hunter said -- he's right, we say it over and over, nothing prepares you more for postseason than the Southeastern Conference. Great teams that play in great environments, and we say it all the time, if you don't play well in our league, you lose. It's as simple as that. You have to play well. It doesn't matter who you're playing, where you're playing. If you don't play well, you lose in our league.

So that's the two-edged sword. It's very unforgiven through the 30 games, but what that 30 games does for you is it weathers you, it thickens your skin and it prepares you for postseason.

As far as North Carolina, I think the question was to Hunter earlier, are you happy that you're on the side that doesn't have all the SEC teams? And a lot as coaches we joke that, hey, we can't wait to play somebody outside of our league.

But playing a team that's 72-2 in North Carolina, I don't know if it's a great reward, and obviously sarcasm there. But man, they're good. And they've had a tremendous year.

I think they lost their first weekend in conference play and then ran through another really good conference, nine weeks in a row.

And there is no weakness. They pitch at a high level. They hit at a high level. They're tough to strike out. They steal bases. They do everything well. And they're experienced as well.

Q. When I asked Will the question, I used the term "contact," and that's probably not the correct way to phrase it. It should probably be timely hitting. And I think when you look at the phrase "timely hitting," who embodied that most in your super regional was Brayden Randle. You inserted him into the outfield, and he came up with a couple of big plate appearances in that super. Outfield's more spacious here in Omaha at Charles Schwab Field. Do you plan on continuing to do that throughout the College World Series?

MIKE BIANCO: It's certainly an option. I don't know if I'm ready to say that or release a starting lineup. But Brayden, that didn't happen just in the super regional. He had been taking fly balls for a couple weeks out there, really since we left Hoover and the SEC Tournament, where we only played one game there, but he probably had three or four really good at-bats better than anybody on the team.

And a lot of times when you get to that bottom of the lineup, you're looking for that one guy to kind of give you a little bit of a spark. And certainly the infielders moving to the outfielders, a shortstop that's athletic that can run, so you feel comfortable that he can play it defensively and it adds another piece to your offense.

And to continue on with the timely hit, that's I think one of the things that I think has been different for this offense at least the last three weeks, but really the second half of the

season where when we were struggling offensively, it was more the bottom half of the lineup. It seems obvious, but we were really weak.

Then when Fed got hot, when we got into conference play, and then you add in Paino and then Fawley has swung the bat really terrific the last month. Then when you add in Randle, a big home run by Reuter, you talk about timely hits in Game 1 of the super regional, big home run to center field, the bottom of the lineup has been a lot more productive the last month of the season.

Q. I saw after Auburn you posted a photo with Eddy and Will. I think Eddy posted it. But what's your relationship with Eddy Furniss and how cool is it to have two Furnisses in the World Series after all this time?

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, really cool. And Eddy, as his son just said, the numbers speak for themselves. A legend at LSU, and national champion. A couple-time national champion. Number's retired. I think he's a College Baseball Hall of Famer. All the accolades, not just at LSU but in the Southeastern Conference. And that says a lot.

So a great opportunity of coaching him a couple years at LSU, and so we had a prior relationship, obviously, before Will got here.

But more specifically to your question, it's really neat, I think, for parents at this time to watch your son have success at the highest level of amateur baseball, but I think really cool for Eddy to be a parent, and Crystal, his mom, to see that and watch their son realize those dreams that Eddy did.

And to see him -- that picture was taken right after the press conference of the super regional. I didn't realize it, but Eddy gave me a hug and he said, You know we went to Omaha in '96, and this is 30 years later exactly that my son's getting to go. And we took that picture.

He sent it to me, and I sent it to Coach Bertman, and just a cool moment. Parents have those moments, but when you're a guy like Eddy Furniss, it's really neat for somebody to step away from being the star and all the accolades that I've already mentioned and to sit back and just be a proud dad. I think that's really neat.

Q. Hunter spoke on this, but from your perspective, what similarities does this group have to that 2022 group?

MIKE BIANCO: Different in a way where that team was the proverbial last team in. This team knew they were

going to postseason all along.

Different that that team played really well, '22, at the very beginning of the season. We were ranked number one to start conference play for a couple of weeks. And then for about four, six weeks in a row, four to six weeks, we lost and fell to 7-14, and you know the rest of the story.

This team never got to that elite level during the season. We played well, but it was a hard road, as we said. The schedule was just brutal through the ten weeks. I don't know. You hear all the time it was the most difficult. I'll let you guys decide that.

But certainly it was a tough road through those ten weeks of conference. But they handled it. The similarities is the leadership, the oldness that we talked about, the veteran leadership, how much they cared about one another, how much fun they have with one another.

That means so much, and that's the stuff that's behind the curtain that you guys don't get to see. Most of the time we don't know that. You don't know how close-knit a group is going to be. You don't know the leadership until you get going into the season and you have the adversity and those types of things.

But I would think that's the biggest similarities is that was a neat team to be around, how much they cared for one another, how much they liked being with one another, and then you had guys like Elko and Bench and Graham that were great leaders on that team.

And here you look at Utermark, who is like Elko 2.0. And then you've got a veteran presence in Elliott and Furniss, a guy that's been here for four years. So those are the similarities. I think that they were great teams with great leadership.

Q. Coach, it was previously mentioned, like postgame pictures. One surfaced of you wearing the stormtrooper helmet. This team hits a lot of home runs, and that's the celebration that will be across ESPN networks. What's the story behind it that you know of and about the offense's approach? Just a word on that?

MIKE BIANCO: I'll connect the dots a little bit. I'm probably not the best one to answer it. We're in Gainesville, I don't know which day, but I'm going to guess it was day two. It was Easter weekend. So it was probably Friday.

I went into one of the meeting rooms. There's a stormtrooper helmet on one of the tables, and I like Star

Wars but I only saw the first one, a little bit of the second one. That's a whole other story. My family rags me all the time. But I know exactly what the helmet is.

I said like, why is that here? Somebody said we're thinking about making that -- they were kind of testing me, like would you allow it. And we were struggling at the time, especially offensively. Could that be maybe our home run celebration, put the helmet on?

And I think I surprised them by saying, sure, heck, yeah, that's neat. And then when I said that, knew what was going to happen, the first thing that I went to was John Carello, our strength coach, you need to make sure you're in control of that helmet, because of the NCAA rules, you don't want that coming out of the dugout and next thing you know get Judd Utermark to get kicked out of the game or something like that. And so Carello, our strength coach, is the one that's in charge of it, the only one that touches it, the one that hands it to the guy and makes sure that it stays in the dugout.

But I think Judd's home run in Game 3 on Saturday night to tie it up where we eventually win that Game 3 and eventually beat Florida two out of three in Gainesville. Judd's home run was the first one to put the stormtrooper helmet on.

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