

2026 Men's College World Series

Thursday, June 11, 2026

Omaha, Nebraska, USA

Alabama Crimson Tide

Coach Rob Vaughn

Tyler Fay

Justin Lebron

Brady Neal

Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Alabama coach Rob Vaughn, student-athletes Tyler Fay, Justin Lebron, and Brady Neal.

ROB VAUGHN: Obviously made it 27 years in the making getting here. Really excited to be here. What an unbelievable event already, man, just with all the stuff that's been going on. The town of Omaha and how they support this event is absolutely incredible.

So thrilled to be here. But I think very quickly moving past that and getting through today and getting through the opening ceremonies tonight, which are going to be cool.

But turning our attention to a job to do. I think that's what this group has done all year is incredibly workmanlike in their approach and the way they go about their business. I'm excited for them to get to do that on the biggest stage. As much as we're happy to be here, this is not the end goal. We're looking forward to getting out Saturday afternoon and competing against a really talented Oklahoma team.

Q. Justin, we see so often in college baseball where the stars don't necessarily get to this stage, the College World Series. I know the coach just mentioned this is not the end goal, but what does it mean to you to be out there with the guys practicing today but also getting ready to play in this College World Series this year?

JUSTIN LEBRON: Yeah, I think it's amazing to see how our hard work is kind of paying off. Obviously job's not done. But it's kind of like we're right there, step in the right



direction, and just kind of go ahead and finish the job.

Q. Tyler, tell me what it means to be able to take the ball here at Game 1 for you for your team here and how you guys have just got to this point where you just have full trust in the guys behind you too?

TYLER FAY: Yeah, it's pretty awesome to be the guy that starts it off for us, but I think it really wouldn't matter who starts Game 1. Any of us would get the job done. I think we've all been good all year. And really a lot of trust in the bullpen guys and the other starters, and just really exciting to be here for sure.

Q. What does Coach Mike Morrison do for you, given his own Omaha experience, in fact, winning it all?

BRADY NEAL: I'll go since he's my position coach. He's the man. Like, he's an awesome dude. Just full of energy every day. Same guy every day. He's given us some good insight on it. Obviously he's been the one to carry his team and win it all and do all that kind of cool stuff. So just how to be in the moment, stuff like that. He's been a huge help for all of us for sure.

JUSTIN LEBRON: He just really taught me how to be a really good human being, how to like really deal with all the pressure and just really enjoy the moment. I think that's what he was talking about when we were out there. He's like enjoy all this media stuff and all this stuff because, I mean, it's going to be one of the coolest things you do in life.

Q. Tyler, could you talk a little bit more about just what it means to be here, having grown up so close to here, and I believe I saw another interview where you came here for games when you were a kid. Could you talk about that, please?

TYLER FAY: Yeah, it's really special to be back here. I've come to probably five games in my lifetime growing up. I went to a game last year when we were back home after we'd already got knocked out, sadly. But being back here is awesome. I've had hundreds of family members and friends and everyone texting me saying they're going to



come to the game and they're going to come support. So it's kind of just surreal to be back here. Full-circle moment for me.

Q. On that note, what's it mean to have some of your friends and family, if they're going to be here, to come and watch you for a big moment like this?

TYLER FAY: It's going to be really exciting. I haven't thrown in front of a lot of my friends since high school. So a lot of my old teammates and stuff, being able to see all of them and have them supporting me and the boys in the crowd will be really fun.

Q. Brady, your former program came here last year and did a lot of damage. Now this year, Alabama's in the College World Series and you've been a huge part of the postseason success. Has this been kind of what you envisioned when you transferred into Tuscaloosa?

BRADY NEAL: Yeah, 100 percent, when Coach Vaughn came to see me in the Cape, this is the same thing we wanted to do. We wanted to take Alabama to the College World Series and win it all. We're here to have fun and do all this fun stuff, but we want to win baseball games.

Like at the end of the day, it's cool to be here, but it's really cool to win it. So that's our goal, and we just complete the thing game by game, step by step, just tackle each thing on the itinerary we got every day, just be consistent, be consistent, go try to win it all.

Q. Tyler, could you just talk a little bit about how you're sort of trying to manage these emotions with -- you mentioned everyone from your hometown coming up I-80 to see you and kind of getting that through your head and by the time you step on the hill?

TYLER FAY: I think it's all just exciting. I think every game is really the same. I mean, you go out there and you pitch. You try to execute each pitch. So I think it will just be a little bit more exciting. Might have a little bit more adrenaline than normal. But I've been going about it trying to stay the same.

Q. Brady, how much growth do you think you were able to undergo this past season? Does it make it more special now that you're here in this moment with a chance to go far?

BRADY NEAL: Yeah, 100 percent, I think I made a lot of strides. Like, year to year in college baseball, I feel like it's common for guys to go year by year, making big strides, and getting better at little different things they need to get better at.

And, I mean, we wouldn't be here if we didn't make strides during the season. I've been in spots this year where we've been struggling and doing this and that. And I think these guys would say the same thing, it's about can you correct it and keep moving.

Q. Just talk about the gauntlet that is the SEC and is it kind of ironic you get here and now you're facing Oklahoma and it's an all SEC bracket.

TYLER FAY: Yeah, the SEC is really tough, obviously. I don't really think it's a big surprise to have five teams in. I know it's more than they've had before. But in the past, what, eight years, it's been an SEC team winning it. I think the level of competition every week, it's just tough.

So it kind of builds each team up and gets them ready for the biggest stage.

JUSTIN LEBRON: No doubt. I think it's a very good thing for teams like us to go through the ups and downs of the years against very good teams. I think what it does, it puts us in a really good position in the postseason just to go out there and you're going to play those teams again. You're going to be in tough moments throughout the season. So it will really come out in the postseason.

BRADY NEAL: Yeah, I mean, the crazy thing to me I was just thinking about is three out of the four byes in Hoover, like that's crazy to think about, the talent that Texas and Georgia and all these teams have is unbelievable. And the ACC's good too. All these other conferences, West Virginia, they're all really good teams. The SEC's the top of the top, in my opinion, but I've never played in any other conference, you know. So it's just a testament to how many good players there are in college baseball.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Rob, we talked in the fall about how this team might be a really special team, and we talked a lot about how this team just needs to grow a little bit. Seems like you guys got over the hump, grew throughout the season. Talk to us about how special this team was through the season and how it was being able to host a regional and super regional at home?

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, we've shown these guys these videos of Kobe Bryant's press conference and there at the end when he retired in the Staples Center in front of all these people, talking about the journey and the journey is what matters.

And, man, we all look at these trophies at the end and you

all want all this stuff. But the journey's what makes life worth it. And I think for these guys they've been through it a little bit in some really cool ways.

You look at we lose opening night. We got beat opening night at home by Washington State. Opening SEC weekend, we got swept at Kentucky. And, man, nobody wants to experience that failure. My guys have heard me say time and time again that failure is a prerequisite to success. Like, it hardens you and it toughens you. It calluses you for what's to come if you let it. Or you recede into your shell and you quit and start feeling bad for yourself.

But if you use failure, it can really build you. And I think it's what this team did. And I think that's what makes them such a fun group to coach. Every one of you guys can look at our stat sheet and you'd be like, that team shouldn't be here right now, and instead all they do is the strength of this group is the group. The strength of this team is the team.

And I think that's what has made it such a rewarding journey for them and to be here in this moment, to have the first team in 27 years kick the door down to be the team that represents toughness and grit. It's what Alabama is, and that's the teams of the late '90s, that's what they were. They were talented, sure, but, man, they were tough and they were gritty. They were all those things. So this team is a very deserving team to get this team back to where it belongs.

Q. At Maryland, you guys make big-time strides, and then you jump to Alabama, and you're coaching in the SEC against some of the best competition in the country. Is this kind of what you envisioned with your team out there warming up getting ready to play a College World Series game at Charles Schwab Field?

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, college athletics is in a different place than it was 10 years ago for a lot of different reasons. And I think you see it a lot of times, I think, it's become talent acquisition business in a lot of different ways, where people are just trying to go hire mercenaries to come in and compete.

And it's not always -- it doesn't always not work. Sometimes it does. Sometimes it works. But I think our goal all along -- what we did at Maryland, for those of you that had been there, you ain't drawing people there because of the stadium. I can promise you that. It's not the weather. It's not those things.

It's a special place. It's a place that, man, I cut my teeth on. It's a place that gave me a chance when I probably

didn't deserve a chance.

And my time there and what we learned as a staff there I think is exactly what's allowed us to have success here, and that's that people matter, that's that building culture matters.

And even in a world where I know people say that's hard to do, the right kids are out there. It's so easy for us to say all these kids are out there chasing money and doing this. And, yeah, there's guys that do that, and sometimes it works. But at the end of the day for us it's always been about culture. It's about getting the right people in the door.

And that's what we did for 11 years at Maryland. And I think that's what's allowed us to have a lot of success there over the years, was we had some talent there. You had some big leaguers there. You had some really good players there. But you had a lot of right people there.

And so when we came down to Alabama, that was a huge piece, is can we take that blueprint, is that going to play in the best league in America. And there was no guarantees to anything. Right? Like we talk about that. Being unafraid to crash and burn. That's something my guys hear me say all the time.

That was our coaching staff's philosophy coming in, it's like now we're going to send it with how we do things. We're not going to come here and change how we do things, how we've built things. We're going to try to see if that blueprint will play in the best league in America.

And the fun and rewarding thing is that people still matter. Like people can still matter. These kids can still matter. Treating people right can still matter. Building culture can still happen.

I think when you do that, it stands the test of time and it lasts a heck of a lot more than one year. And when we made this movie to Alabama, that's what it was. This was not a, hey, let's come in here and let's be really good and then let's see what comes next.

It was if we're moving our family and I'm moving Coach Morrison's family and Coach Papio's family and asking JJ to stay, if we're going to do this thing, let's settle in and build something that's going to last for the long haul.

And I think that's what has been rewarding is culture doesn't fade. It really doesn't. If you can build it, lay the foundation right, it doesn't fade. And that's what has been really rewarding about the last couple years here.

Q. When you think about guys like Tyler, Justin and Brady, some of the other upperclassmen on the teams, how much do you guys like that embody your program embody your culture, and how much can you lean back on those guys when you're on the big stage like this?

ROB VAUGHN: It's not hard like it's in business. I talk about this all the time. 30 years ago, if you had invested in Google early on, you'd probably be a heck of a lot richer than if you had invested in Google yesterday. It's like the early adopters are the ones that always hold a special place in your heart.

Every one of these kids trusted us before Alabama was really on the map in some ways. Like we talked about our vision. We talked about what we believe we could build here. We talked about the type of people we needed in the room. But there's no guarantee on the other end.

And these kids trusted with their career. Brady Neal left a perennial powerhouse and trusted us with his career Justin Lebron could have gone anywhere in the country that he wanted to after his freshman year and chose to do it at Alabama. All before we had done anything. And a guy like Tyler Fay who redshirted his first year and wasn't on the roster and turns into the player he is now.

Those guys all trusted us whether -- before there was proof of concept. It was just talking about our vision and what we believed we could do. And those are the kind of kids you never forget.

It's not hard for this next year. I mean, I'll tell you, everyone talks about recruiting right now and how difficult it is being in Omaha and trying to balance a transfer portal and high school kids. Well, guess what? It's a lot easier to make these phone calls from Omaha, I'll tell you that, like, and to talk to some of these kids. It's a heck of a lot easier to talk about, hey, I gotta go, man. I gotta head out to practice at Charles Schwab. That's a little bit easier sell at times.

But there's a special place in your heart for those kids that really trusted in the vision that the staff had laid out for them well before it kind of came to fruition. So special kids. You don't get to places like we are now without special people.

Q. Alabama had a stellar freshman recruiting class this past year. It's hard to get to College World Series. And if the fans at home don't realize that, they can look across the road. Your rival had really nice recruiting class two years ago, and it resulted in two straight top 4 seeds in the NCAA Tournament, and yet Alabama

does it in year one with all these freshmen. Can you talk about the process and kind of how that has been a little bit rewarding and then what the future may look for you guys?

ROB VAUGHN: Lord, I don't want to say anything that's going to get me in trouble here. Butch Thompson is one of the best ever to do it. Like you talk about a dude that does it the right way and a human that does it the right way. Golly, that might be one of one right there.

And so now the Alabama side of me does not hate when those guys aren't here and we are, but the human side of you loves those guys. Karl Nonemaker, dear friend of mine. Like those guys are special dudes, and they ain't going anywhere, I'm going to tell you that right now. They got a lot of dudes back, and we're going to have to deal with that gauntlet next year.

But looking at our class, man, it's the same thing. You've got a lot of kids that trusted you with the draft. I still remember, we flew into the Omaha airport to go visit Tyler Fay last year. I know he's not a freshman. But you talk about the best get we got last summer was that guy deciding to come back to school.

But then you're having conversations with Myles Upchurch. You're having conversations with Caleb Barnett and Chase Kroberger and Luke Smyers and some of these young freshmen about, hey, trust us with your development. Be willing to delay your gratification. And if they give you the money you want -- I don't go into these houses and try to talk kids out of signing and bash -- it doesn't work. I tried that in my career. It doesn't work.

It's, hey, man, if they're going to give you what you're worth, then great. But don't sell a Ferrari for the price of a beat-up Ford. We talked about that all the time with them. And I think these guys just trust us with this.

And you never know. Those guys are all going to be impact players here at the University of Alabama in their careers.

You look at a guy like Eric Hines, who walked away from some money and came back to school or walked away from some money out of high school, came to school and didn't start for a while. And in the lineup, now middle of the order, Tuscaloosa kid.

That freshman class is what allows us to look towards the future. Because as a coach you're doing everything. You're trying to enjoy this moment. You're trying to prepare your guys for this. But at the same time we're looking to next year. We're looking to the year after that,

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

and after that. And so you're constantly kind of working through all of that stuff.

And the one thing I can tell you about that freshman class is, whether they've been huge contributors on the field or not, they're a huge part of why we're here, and they're a huge part of why we're not going anywhere.

Q. Could you just talk a little bit more about Tyler's kind of unique journey to get to where he is now and how well he's been pitching of late?

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, this might sound corny, but I still think, man, our job in college baseball, yes, it's to win games, yes, it's to develop Big Leaguers, and, yes, it's all the things that we all talk about in recruiting, but more than anything, it's to prepare these kids to be successful for whatever comes next.

And, man, as good as the talent is in this league, as good as the talent is on this team, not all of them are going to be career Big Leaguers.

And I think what makes Tyler's journey so awesome is in a world that is inundated with particularly moms and dads that want your kid to cut and run when they're not starting every day or they're not playing every day, and you see it one end of the -- you either get the parents are like, hey, man, put your head down and work, we've got to get better; and you get the parents that feed into the narrative, man: They're not giving you a chance. You've got to go. You've got to leave. You've got to do that.

Tyler Fay's parents are unbelievably special people, which is why Tyler is who he is. And, man, there's not too many guys in the world we're in now that not only -- not only did he not pitch a lot his freshman, he didn't pitch any his freshman year. And he stayed. He pitched a little bit out of the bullpen, and he stayed.

We did some different things and finally got him in a starting role in year three, could have signed with a pro team this year if he wanted to, and chose to stay anyway. And, man, fruits of that are a no-hitter against one of the best offenses in the country in Florida. Starting and winning a regional championship and a super regional championship and going to toe the rubber in the College World Series.

That's why you come back to school. And I think the thing about him that makes him so special is regardless of whether Tyler's a 20-year Big Leaguer or not, that guy's going to be a smashing success in life, because when things get hard, he doesn't cut and run. He's not sticking his hand out looking for the next easy way and who is

going to pay me more and who is going to do that.

It's I'm going to put my head down. I'm going to work and I'm going to get better. And man, that's the benchmark of kids that play at the University of Alabama. That's how we go about our business. He is case study one of what it looks like to be an Alabama baseball player, and that's when things are hard, man, you dig in.

And I think it's so easy for us as coaches to bash players for doing that. A lot of times coaches, we do that, too. I didn't hit .380 as a freshman, cut him, let's go get a guy. That happens all around the country. I'm not saying it's never happened with any team I've coached. I get it.

But, man, guys like him are the exact reason you believe in what you recruit. You believe in makeup. You better hunt makeup because that guy has that in spades, and that's why he deserves every ounce of what he's getting right now.

And, man, special kid. I could sit here and talk about him for hours upon hours. I love the kid. His wife is the best of the best. I flew my tail up here to Des Moines, Iowa, in January, freezing my tail off to go to that wedding, and I'd say it was worth every single penny of that trip.

Q. Just looking at Oklahoma, what are your kind of general thoughts on them then? When you look back to your series with them in April, what do you think some areas of growth have been?

ROB VAUGHN: I think both teams are incredibly different right now. They're playing great baseball right now. They're as hot as can be right now. The team itself is just very different.

We didn't see Court back there. He was hurt and missed that start. We didn't face him. I don't know if that's announced, but I assume who we're going to see on Saturday. We'll see. Saw Mercurius, the younger Mercurius come out of the bullpen with electric, felt like he was throwing 15 pitches, they were all for strikes, at 100. Electricity out of him.

At the time Dayton Lachance was, that guy flailed at every slider you threw at the plate. Now look at him, you're like, golly, he had no homers when we played him then. But he's got 15 now. He's catching every day, Brock was catching that. I think Brock's been playing more outfield now. Tockey was hitting about .170 at the time. Not playing. Pinch hit in the Sunday game. And now hit the huge walkoff homer at Georgia Tech. Teams are just very different than when we played a month ago.

Now do we know style of play, do they know our style of play, absolutely. But I think both teams are very different teams than they are today, which is a sign of a Skip Johnson-coached team. That's -- it's not an accident that Skip's been here a lot with different programs. His assistant is a head coach. That guy is an unbelievable baseball coach, and I think he's got his team playing their best baseball at the right time. And so man, we know we're going to have our hands full. I think like I said, I think we've got a pretty good idea of style of play, but man, that was also, they didn't get a lot of Eric Hines. That was really his coming-out party. That was his first I think weekend starting was there. So we're a little bit different on our side, too. So you get two teams playing really consistent, really good baseball right now, battling out at one or 2:00, whatever time it is on Saturday on the biggest stage. So should be a heck of a show.

Q. You mentioned JJ, associate coach Jason Jackson. This program was in a much different spot a couple years ago when you're currently standing sitting right now in the Omaha College World Series, talk about the impact coach Jackson has made under your coaching staff but also the journey this program has been on?

ROB VAUGHN: Yesterday, before we left Tuscaloosa, I did a radio interview, we talked about JJ for a while. And I'm happy for all my coaches when we finished that thing on Monday afternoon, Monday late morning.

But for him, to get to hug him at the end of that was something, that moment I'll never forget, because JJ and I didn't know each other before this whole thing went down. He took over a really tough situation in '23 and stepped in as the interim head coach and did an incredible job of leading that team to -- you can argue that team, I'm sitting watching from afar, I'm trying to get this job, they're going to end up in Omaha, I'm not getting this job.

But I'm watching him, and I'm having conversations with AD Greg Byrne at the time, he's asking me, what do you think about JJ. To be honest, I know a lot about him, I've never had a conversation with JJ and taking over a program like this. I have to make sure I have people I trust.

So what if I connect you guys? So me and JJ had a conversation. I was in the hotel at Wake Forest. Me and him had a conversation, and we spent the first half hour of that talking about our families, not talking about baseball not talking about pitching mechanics, talked about our families.

And I went back and watched every press conference of his from Hoover. All he did, while people were heaping

praise on him, was deflect it to the players and deflect it to other people. Very quickly, I was like, golly, you talk about people that are cut from the same cloth, like, this is my kind of guy. If we can do anything we can to keep him here, we need to do it.

He trusted me at a time that he didn't have to do that. That guy could have had some people calling to hire him that summer. He just led the team through a great thing. There were some big-time pitching coaching jobs wanted to talk to him. And he chose Alabama.

It's great. It feels good when people come up, coach, you turned it around, you've done this. Jason Jackson started that. Jason Jackson started that 10 years ago. What he did and his commitment to this place to stay when he didn't have to, he deserves every ounce of what he's doing here.

And man, like what he's done with his pitching staff is nothing short of unbelievable, of the development. The only coach in the last, I think we're six years running now, to have a million-dollar arm come out every single year. That's development.

Every one of those guys are homegrown dudes from the University of Alabama that came in and worked their way through, not a kid we got out of the transfer portal and sprinkled magic dust on them for six months and turned him into a first-rounder. Guys that went through his system for three plus years and turned themselves into million dollar arms. Like it's not an accident.

If you spend five minutes talking to him, it is the most unselfish, most humble, most real human you'll ever be around. And the reason you hear Tyler Fay acts like he acts is Jason Jackson. The reason you hear these things is because of JJ and how he works through these things. And him and his wife Katie are very special to our family. As are all my coaches. But Pat's been with me for 15 years. I coached him. I've seen his journey all the way through. Mo came and trusted us in Maryland back years ago and has turned into one of the best dang recruiting coordinators in the country.

JJ trusted a guy that had never coached in the league, that had never played in the league, when he could have very easily taken the safer route and gone to one of these bigger names, these bigger things.

He trusted a guy he didn't know with his family's future, and I have never forgot that. And, man, he deserves every ounce. Yes, I was excited for us. I was excited for our players. I was excited for our coaches. But not always in life do you get rewarded for doing the right thing.

Sometimes you get punched right in the nose for doing the right thing. And to see JJ get rewarded with leading a team and a pitching staff to Omaha in a place that he's invested in far longer than I have, I am so grateful for him. I'm so grateful for what he does, grateful for his friendship. I could go on and on about him. He's a special human. I'm just fortunate to get to coach alongside him every day.

Q. Three super regionals in the state of Alabama, two teams from Alabama in the College World Series. And the other one is Troy, a mid-major program from the same state that you happen to share a home-and-home series with most years. Just a statement on the state of college baseball in Alabama right now.

ROB VAUGHN: Awesome. It's something -- it's great for our state. And we've talked about that a lot. Like, looking at where the state of college baseball is in the state of Alabama is pretty awesome. You had some other teams that had unbelievable years.

Casey Dunn at UAB and what his team did. And you look at Samford, what those guys do year in, year out and just pump out really good players and put competitive teams on the field. You had Alabama State in a regional.

The state is in such an awesome place right now. I think it's a tribute to a lot of really good coaches and the players in the state of Alabama. I think there's some really good -- you look around the country -- there's some really good high school players from the state of Alabama. That's one thing we really wanted to do coming in.

We did that at Maryland. We said we want to put the walls up at Maryland and the best players at Maryland stay home. We did that some. We didn't do that all the time. But we tried.

And man, that's what I want here. There's some really good players in the state. And we need to recruit the state and get, man, if we lose to Auburn, if you lose to Troy, if you lose to those guys on a player, I get it, but we better be on them.

And we want to do a good job for all these kids in the state that want to play with the Script A across their chest. That means a heck of a lot to a lot of people. I've only been here for two and a half years. This will be year -- obviously finishing year three. It took me about five minutes to realize how much that Script A means to people.

I tell our guys, man, we have a responsibility every time we put that uniform on to leave it in a better place than we found it.

Yes, Omaha feels great. But it's more than that. It's the style of play. It's how we carry ourselves. It's how we go about our business. The coolest thing is I will never forget this conversation with this guy named Brett Taft, who played here in the late '90s, who coaches over at ACA, one of Eric Hines' coaches in high school.

And I remember talking to him outside of a field one time, he was like, man, those teams in the nineties, they would just as soon fight you as they would beat you on the field. He was, like, they were tough. We were hard-nosed, tough, gritty teams. And that's never left me. That's what the state of Alabama is. That's what our university's built on. Coach Saban's teams, I promise you those teams weren't soft. Yeah, they were good. Yes, they were disciplined. But, golly, those guys were smash-in-the-mouth and tell you to like it.

And that's what I wanted our teams to be built on. Yes, we want good players. We want all that stuff. But a prerequisite to that is us carrying the torch forward for the University of Alabama is the style and how we go about our business.

So, man, what an unbelievable university to get the opportunity to work for. It's not lost on me. I'm trying to steward this program well. This is not my program. I'm trying to steward it the right way. And the people that came before, the Coach Wells and Coach Gaspard, like those guys, they deserve these moments, deserve to see Alabama in this place.

So it's a really neat thing for our state right now to have two teams here in Omaha. Like I said, you've got a dang good one sitting at home right.

But I can promise you, it won't be long before they're back here. That's why I texted Butch in the middle of it. I said, man, let's get through this thing. Let's let Alabama and Auburn meet in the final. That would be a heck of a show. So cool for the state, proud to be a part of it. Just grateful for where I'm at right now.

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