

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Tuesday, May 20, 2025

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Kentucky Wildcats

Nick Mingione

Devin Burkes

Postgame Press Conference



Oklahoma 5, Kentucky 1

NICK MINGIONE: I give Oklahoma a lot of credit. They threw the ball exceptionally well today. I thought we had Barfield on the ropes in the first. He made the pitch, got a huge double play, and I thought Hitt was fantastic. Nothing he threw today was straight. It was forcing fastball, it was the two-seamer, it was change-up, cutter. He threw well. Then, obviously, Crooks in the end. I give them a lot of credit. They made pitches. They got us grounded to three double plays and made it really hard to get the at-bats going.

It was really hard for us today to just string together the quality at-bats when our offense really goes. Tip your cap to them. They made pitches when it mattered the most.

Q. Devin, I do want to ask you about this team and kind of where y'all are mentally heading into the regional play. As the senior will leader, what is the message to some of these younger guys given your success with this program?

DEVIN BURKES: We're just ready to see what's to come, ready for next week. We're ready. We're battle tested, as Coach would say all the time, and we've been through the best league in America. Yeah, we're just ready. We're anticipating what's next.

Q. Devin, what do you feel like, just having had this experience before, you want this next week to look like? What has to happen this week going into next week for everybody to stay sharp and be the best they can be?

DEVIN BURKES: It starts by when we get back, first practice. First practice. We take things one step at a time. First warmup, first practice when we get back, just handle

the small things and the big things will come.

Q. What does it mean for the Lexington community and the alumni just to have you guys back through so much, even last year getting to Omaha for the first time? How do you feel about what lies ahead for you guys next week, wherever you may end up?

DEVIN BURKES: Like I just said, we're ready. We're anticipating what's coming next. We're excited to be looking forward towards more postseason ball, and yeah, we're ready.

Q. How frustrating were the three double plays?

DEVIN BURKES: It's baseball, man. It's baseball. It's hard. But that's what comes with the game. Just keep putting together quality at-bats. We just had a problem stringing them together back-to-back-to-back today, which like Coach said, props up their pitchers. They made a tough one on us. But it's baseball, man. You can't let your emotions get out of whack.

Q. I know it's probably premature to think about this after a loss, but what does this program mean to you? You're a guy who's done so much for this program and left it all on the field. As you approach your final NCAA regionals, what does this program mean to you?

DEVIN BURKES: Yeah, man, I can't thank Coach enough, baby. Can't thank Coach enough.

But boss man here gave me the opportunity to be here, play in front of BBM, stay for the state of Kentucky. I'm from Florida so that's a far ways away. But yeah, it just means the most to me to put on this blue, put on UK and go out there and go to war. So yeah.

Q. As we head into postseason play, you guys are facing hardship lately, two walk-off home runs last weekend. Do you think that's a good thing for you guys mentally, that maybe you're getting it out of the way before regional play starts?

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NICK MINGIONE: I will say this: Every season you want your team to experience a little bit of everything because when the postseason comes around, you don't ever want something to happen that's never happened, whether that's rain delays, down early, come back late, down late, come back, blow a lead, come back, go to extras. When you think about our season, we literally -- I really feel like we've experienced a little bit of everything.

Anytime you can do that as a coach, I have peace because I can look our players in the eye and say there's nothing that's going to happen in this game that you're not prepared for or you haven't been through, and that's the beauty of our conference. It's like when you go through and you play that many good teams over and over and over, it prepares you, and I think that's one of the main reasons why the Southeastern Conference has had so much success in the postseason.

Q. The identity of last year's team and how special that crew was and what they were able to accomplish for Kentucky and making their first Omaha trip ever, what does this year's squad mean and the identity around it?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, I give this team so much credit because when you look at last year's team, we lost so many guys off that team. So there was a lot of first-year players in our program that were asked to really carry a torch that they weren't even, for the most part -- we've had a handful of guys, but we had over 30 guys that were first-year players for our program. So they walked into something that was super special.

This team has done an awesome job of really just picking up right where we were. I mean, from when you think about, yeah, last year we started, I think it was like 15-1, right? It's like unheard of. It's happened two, three, maybe four times in the history of the league, to start off that good, and we had a team actually do it this year. So I enjoyed every second of that personally. But at the same time, this group had to learn how to win.

We experienced so much. When you think about -- yeah, our 13 wins and how close we were, we have 12 losses by 17 runs. We were in every game. This team has earned my respect and the respect of the other coaches around our league. I've gotten the greatest compliments from this team and their identity and how they understand what we're trying to do and their ability to execute at a very high level.

This season has been so rewarding for me because we took a bunch of guys that, quite frankly, weren't in our program, most of them, a year ago, and they just -- credit

to the guys that have been in our program that we did have back off that team. They did an unbelievable job leading them and teaching them and preparing us now for the postseason.

Q. I do want to ask you, in particular after a couple losses, about Devin Burkes and his leadership for this program. How much do you lean on him and your other leaders of this team?

NICK MINGIONE: Oh, Devin is special. Five years, when you think about that, when you get to spend five years with somebody like that, with a smile like that, with toughness like that, with edge like that. It's been a real joy to watch his growth, both personally and athletically. It's been pretty special.

Then when you think about what he's done, as he's been our everyday catcher for the most part, and what he's done and meant to, not only our team, but our community, I mean, the guy -- he won Mr. Wildcat two years in a row. Everything about him. He's an amazing student, amazing person. What a teammate.

There's going to be a lot of sad tears when he takes that jersey off for the last time because he's been unbelievable.

Evan Byers has been an unbelievable leader, Jackson Nove, James McCoy has been in our program for four years. He's got another year of eligibility, but the job that he's done, these guys have just poured their heart and soul into this place. They're a couple wins away from being the all-time winningest senior class in UK baseball history. They've meant a lot to our program.

Q. What do you want this week to look like given it's just human nature you're going to have a clubhouse full of anxious guys waiting to hear their fate on Monday?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, what we'll do is, we'll get back, give them a day or two to give their bodies -- we've been on the road ever since Vanderbilt last week, and then immediately get right into practice. We'll set up some modified scrimmages this week to keep their arm in shape, and in a good spot. We'll keep making sure our pitching is lined up, and we'll just continue to keep going, and then next week, same deal. We'll give them off, probably, Monday, and then Tuesday, light day Wednesday, and then find out where we're going because for the first time in a couple years, we will not be hosting a regional. That's been nice, to be at home. So we'll find out where we're going and travel.

But they'll need a day or two just to get their bodies back

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underneath them, and then we'll go right into live at-bats and scrimmages and preparing them to get ready.

We've been fortunate enough the last two years to win regionals, so we've got a locker room with some guys in it that know what it takes to win. So we'll just get them ready that way. But it will start with their physical rest for the next couple days.

Q. How do you feel about where the SEC is going as a conference? Oklahoma and Texas being in the same first year, and just the added level of talent over 30 guys on MLB pipeline, how do you see where the SEC competition is growing year in, year out, and Oklahoma and Texas filling in the gap?

NICK MINGIONE: Yeah, I love our slogan: It just means more. We just keep getting better and better teams. People ask me: what was it like to have Texas in the league? I said, they've been to the College World Series more than anybody in the history of college basketball, then Oklahoma just played for a national championship in '22. So we added two premier programs.

You know what, I'm the guy that -- like, I want to try to see and predict. I absolutely love how softball gets every single team in the NCAA Tournament. I don't know if we'll ever get the full 16, but boy, I can see it maybe one day. Our league just keeps getting better. The beauty of what's happened with our conference is the rest of the country has realized just how powerful this league is, and any given day, any given team can beat anybody in this league.

And quite frankly, if you can beat anybody in this league, you can beat anybody in the country. That's the one thing that I've been so proud of our team for, to have as many wins as we have and then to be in so many baseball games, it's a real credit to our team.

Someone has got to lose. Like teams in our league, somebody has to lose. The games are going to be super close. They're going to be dogfights. But our league just keeps getting better, and this year is no different. We just keep getting better and better. It's fun to be a part of for 19 years. It's given me some gray hair, though.

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