

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Wednesday, May 21, 2025

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Alabama Crimson Tide

Rob Vaughn

Richie Bonomolo, Jr.

Postgame Press Conference



Tennessee 15, Alabama 10

ROB VAUGHN: Really good game through 6, really through 5. You know, when they come out, they were swinging the bats extremely well early. I thought we minimized and did a good job of minimizing innings early. Were able to tie the game up. They make kind of a cost error there with two outs, and Richie follows that up with a huge double that gave us the lead there, and you're kind of back in it in, very honestly, a game that felt like we were down 10-0 going into that inning.

So to grab the lead there in the middle is exactly where you want to be. And then we just couldn't stop them. I mean, that offense was firing on all cylinders today. They didn't make mistakes. They capitalized on stuff. At the end of the day, just couldn't slow them down.

These kids fought and scratched and clawed to the very end, just too big of a hole to get ourselves out of there. Wish we would have played a little bit better there, but we'll turn our attention to this week and get to work and, hopefully, play baseball for a couple more weeks.

Q. What was working for you at the plate today?

RICHIE BONOMOLO JR.: I think our hitting coach does a great job of putting a scouting report out there and just committing to our plan. We go to the plate with a plan, and I just executed it. When you're doing it for your team, it feels even better.

Q. On the one where you got tagged out at second, were you disappointed to see Cade not get the wave?

RICHIE BONOMOLO JR.: Not really. I think in the moment, I should have kept my eyes up rounding second, and it was kind of too late when I looked up and everything

happened. But everything happens for a reason, so...

Q. For you guys to come in, in the ninth and still put some runs across home base and try to continue to make this a ballgame late, what does that late effort show about the resiliency that this group has, and how can that benefit you guys in the NCAA Tournament?

RICHIE BONOMOLO JR.: I think we've been incorporating something like it's always about the finish, and even though we lost today, I think the fight kind of showed how much our team puts into this baseball team. So I think it was perfect.

Q. How are you feeling after running into the wall, and what was your reaction to that play?

RICHIE BONOMOLO JR.: It wasn't as bad. The wall had padding. But I think it was a cool play, hard-hit ball, just got there, and I think it was cool looking at the scoreboard and seeing the little replay, so it was a cool catch.

Q. What's it like the next week, you guys might host a regional possibly. How do you feel about what you guys want to do next week to capitalize on the tournament?

RICHIE BONOMOLO JR.: I think no matter what, our team knows what our strengths are, and we know what we have to work on. If we're hosting a regional or going somewhere for a regional, it's not going to matter. We're still just going to show up and do what we do.

Q. You rallied back from 5-1, take the lead. How difficult is it to try to manufacture two big rallies in one single game against the defending national champions?

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, Tennessee, you kind of saw what they were. I know they've scuffled a little bit down the stretch and haven't played their best baseball, and that offense is scary. When it gets rolling, it's scary, and they were rolling from the rip. I think they were on time. They were taking stuff away. And they just got in a groove there.



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So it just got hard to stop.

Really, as weird as the first five innings were, you felt about as good as you could with a 6-6 game and running Zane Adams in, and it's a little bit a different role for him, and something he's not used to. He wasn't sharp. You know, we get two freebies there to the middle, and that's when we need him to come down and kind of shut that down.

And believe me, it ain't a lack of effort for that kid. I mean, he made available today and wanted to pitch today. We just didn't have great stuff today. And then, you know, that 5 spot happened.

And then you saw AJ Russell really settle in. The report on that guy, it's very limited, right-right changeups, and you saw him to really start to land that right-right change a lot. That's what good arms do. It's a really good heater. And he threw a ton of strikes. He was ahead in counts.

Once he settled in after that 5-spot -- but he did what he did. You know, when you get the lead, you've got to stay on the attack and go get those zeros, and that's exactly what he did. And we fought and clawed there at the end, but it was just too big of a hole to dig out of.

Q. I know you mentioned yesterday about maybe Riley doing a little bit of angling to get the start today. Ultimately, you guys didn't go in that direction. What went into the thought process there, and specifically with Zane after he didn't come out of the bullpen once all year, and then he's on even shorter rest than Riley would have been?

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, I think a lot of that goes into kind of pitch count. A lot of that goes into workload. A lot of that goes into just history. You look up and Riley is still coming off a TJ, and he's a max effort arm. It's not like it's 86-88 and a changeup guy. It's 98 to 100 and kind of max effort stuff. Riley's pitch count got up a little bit higher last week at Florida. Zane obviously, unfortunately, wasn't in the game there as long at Florida, so just hadn't thrown as many pitches, was a little bit fresher there.

We talked to Riley. He played catch yesterday, and I think would have loved to have got out there and gone. But he was like, man, I just feel okay, and I don't feel awesome. And in that point, there's not a shot I'm going to run that kid out there. That kid is going to make a whole lot of money in about a month and a half, and we got a lot, but we need Riley as fresh as he can be this upcoming Friday.

You saw the same thing, I heard Tony give an interview yesterday talking about Phillips, and it's like you want to win this, you do, but you also can't put your arms at risk,

especially a kid that's poured his heart and soul into Alabama like Riley Quick has. He told me he felt awesome, man, I want to win this thing as bad as anybody, but I'm not willing to put him at risk to do that.

And so Zane felt fresher, didn't throw near as many pitches last week, felt like he could do to it. We wanted Zane to get a clean inning. We weren't going to bring him in, in the middle of a mess, and we thought that was window, top of the lineup coming up.

It would have been really good and Zen with a clean inning, see what he got, and like I said, just wasn't awesome today.

Q. What about this team and their resume; do you think you guys have done enough to host a regional? Or what are your thoughts on that?

ROB VAUGHN: I think it's interesting. I'm not a politicking coach very often. I'm very much a let your work speak for itself, and if you're good enough to do it, you do it, and if you're not, you're not.

But it's funny, you know, I'm sitting around the hotel room yesterday, and you're watching the SEC now and all this stuff, and they're talking about all this stuff, and it's like, man, Florida plays Ole Miss and Alabama plays Tennessee, and that seems like a fight to host.

The reality is, like, we won 17 games in our league. 17 games in this league. I don't know what our RPI is after today's game, but it's got to be in the top 12 at least. To me, it's a no-brainer. This team went out and won every single midweek game all year. We lost one non-conference game all year. We've done some really good things. You win 17 games in the league with the top 12 RPI. I think it's kind of silly that we're talking about, are we hosting, are we not? It should be seeded in the top 16.

Now within that, it's out of our control. You come here and you win two or three games, you completely take it out of any committee's hands.

But a lot of these teams that you're seeing kind of as locks to host are teams we played this year or teams we beat this year, and some of these things. This league is just something different. Believe me, I spent a lot of time out of this league and got super annoyed with every coach. I got up here and was like, man, you're two games over .500 in your league and you think you should host, and then you come walk through this league and you understand exactly why you should host doing that.

But like I said, it's out of my control. Now, do I think this

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team has done enough? I don't think there's any doubt. I think that resume should speak for itself. But it's in the hands of the committee now, and we'll get back to Tuscaloosa, get back to work, and be prepared for whatever comes next week.

Q. Obviously, along those lines, how much emphasis do you think a selection committee should put on the SEC tournament when there's so many good teams here, and then also, what did you think about the format now that the run is done for y'all?

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, I guess to answer the first part of that question, I've always believed that postseason tournaments should only help you, they should never hurt you. I've always kind of believed that and stuff. Man, you go win games in this league, it don't matter if you're playing them on a Tuesday, if it's a non-conference game on a Tuesday, it's just a whole different animal. It is.

It's hard to explain it, and I understand the coaches that get really frustrated from other leagues when they hear us sit up here and talk about that.

But man, it's just something different. We just got done playing 10 super regionals. That's exactly what we played, and there's nothing that matches that. There's great players all over the country, no doubt about it. There's great teams in the ACC and the Big 12, in the Sun Belt, there's great teams everywhere. No doubt about that.

But there is nothing, not even close to comparing to walking through 10 straight weeks, because you better learn how to take a punch. You better learn how to be resilient. You'd better learn how to show up every day. And our kids have done that. They've done that.

Shoot, we lost one game all year outside of conference play. That tells you how strong this league is.

Then I think as far as the tournament goes, it's hard. Like, it's something that as we as coaches felt like we had to do. You know, open it up when you add two regional caliber teams in Oklahoma and Texas, you feel like you have to make an adjustment to the tournament because there's a heck of a lot more than 12 NCAA teams in this league.

But at the same time, man, this tournament was -- this is the one when I was sitting in Omaha, Nebraska, the Big Ten tournament, I would finish my game and rush back to the hotel so I could watch the SEC tournament. It was awesome. It was an awesome format. It was a bear to get through, but such a cool format.

So like it or not, that's just kind of the hand we were dealt

and what we felt like we needed to do, and I think it's going to be a good thing for the league.

Q. How do you go about preparing from here until next weekend, like you said, not having the cards in your hand, but feeling like you've done enough? What does that look like from a preparation aspect and a mindset to the team and the players how they approach the week?

ROB VAUGHN: Well, we'll have about 10 days until the next game. You know, Whether that's at home or whether on the road, we've got about 10 days. So for, me we'll get home tonight. We'll go back to the hotel, shower, get packed up. We're only an hour from here. We'll get back to Tuscaloosa tonight, get some rest, and we'll talk to the staff. More than likely, give the boys a day tomorrow, just let them get their bodies underneath them, let them rest.

And then we've got to do some things and simulate some stuff. Riley Quick will need to throw, whether it's live hitters, whether it's extended bullpen, whatever that is. We'll do some stuff this weekend. And to me, just get these bodies fresh.

At the end of it, whatever comes next, it's how do we play next weekend. Can we get as fresh as possible, as sharp as possible for next weekend.

So we'll sit down as a staff and put that together. We'll find out, I guess, on Sunday if people are coming to us or whether we're heading somewhere. And then we'll see Monday morning, what that looks like and we'll go to work.

Q. You saw this Tennessee team without AJ Russell fresh back in March, now you saw them with him. How does adding a guy like that change their profile?

ROB VAUGHN: That's just a really darned good team. Marcus Phillips was a Big Leaguer there for three innings there. I was like, man, Tony you said he was going to be up on the pitch count. Man, let's get him out of there. Like, he's thrown enough. I mean, it was 98 to 99 with just plus stuff, all strikes. He was really good.

And then you have Russell. And the impressive thing about him, I thought, is how he did it. He came in, and we kind of blitzed him there early, Richie with a huge two-out double, scoring some runs there, and then he made the adjustment. He was able to start landing that right-right changeup a lot, and that makes 97 from that slot play a heck of a lot better.

You've got to credit him on how he did that. Tony Vitello is one of the best coaches in the country. He does such a



great job with these guys, and they've had their struggles the last few weeks. And just like for everybody, once you get to Hoover, it's kind of a reset, and it doesn't matter if you've won your last 20 or lost your last 20. Everybody is here and it's a clean slate, and they came out and played a really good brand of baseball today.

Q. How do you feel about Neal's preparation for today and also working through the eight relievers that were in doubt after Finateri was pulled, how do you feel about Neal's preparation has been pretty much everything since the fall?

ROB VAUGHN: Yeah, Brady has been great for us. He's just continued to get better. Brady had a tough start to the year, didn't play great down the stretch, I thought was coming out, trying to get 10 hits every at-bat after a rough start, and frankly, Will Plattner was playing really good, and Platt kind of won the job a little bit and was playing a really good brand of baseball, and then fractured his hand at Auburn. That kind of gave Brady a reset.

I think when I saw Brady come back after being out for a few weeks, you saw him come back just kind of with a new lease on it and play a lot freer, and he's had some huge hits for us, has done a great job behind the plate. He's as good of a catch-and-throw guy as I've been around, super athlete back there, can play a ton of positions on the field.

So Brady has been great for us, and we're going to need both those guys down the stretch. Plattner is getting back, he's probably not at 100 percent. He'll tell you he's not quite there yet. But both of those guys are going to be really needed down the stretch here because Platt is one of our toughest kids we've got. So it'll be good to get him back and involved in these things, and Brady is doing a good job with that staff.

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