

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Friday, May 23, 2025

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Ole Miss Rebels

Mike Bianco

Austin Fawley

Judd Utermark

Postgame Press Conference



everybody watching.

So just glad that for the most part everything is all right and glad we were able to get the win.

Q. Talk about every year when Ole Miss goes on a run there's like a moment and there's a saying, don't let the Rebs get hot. Talk about winning for Rebel Nation and what this means to you personally.

AUSTIN FAWLEY: I think it's very important, especially tomorrow, because just sticking together, I mean, next game is the most important game because it's the next game.

Q. Austin, what was the sequence you saw in your at-bat in the first inning and how you felt putting up five runs, the biggest execution off their defensive miscues?

AUSTIN FAWLEY: Well, obviously I was sitting fastball, and the first one I thought was a little up, but they called it a strike. A strike is a strike. He hung the changeup, and I made him pay.

Q. Judd, for you, a good couple weekends at the plate for you. What have you found in your swing or what's been clicking for you?

JUDD UTERMARK: I think I've been finding holes and I've been finding gaps and that's always a good feeling to have whenever balls are falling. But all the credit goes to Coach Clem and Coach Tyler Keenan who have helped me throughout this entire year and years prior, but especially this year, working on my craft, working on my swing. I've been just blessed to have some of them fall.

Q. Austin, you've really taken advantage of the opportunities you've had this year. What has this season been like for you to be such a large contributor of what's happening?

AUSTIN FAWLEY: It's been awesome and just a big thanks to Coach B for giving me that opportunity.

Arkansas 5, Ole Miss 2

MIKE BIANCO: I just thought another really well-played baseball game by two teams, and once again, we were able to put a big inning together. Offensively obviously this one was in the first, and we were able to chain a few at-bats together.

But I really thought the story of the game was Riley Maddox. He was really, really good. It's a difficult lineup, I think, to navigate through, and he did a great job. Once again, I thought our bullpen was outstanding, much like Wednesday night. Just terrific with McCausland, Morris, and then Spence at the end. Happy that we played well and excited that we get to stay another day in Hoover.

Q. Austin, from your perspective behind the dish, what did you see from Riley primarily but also those relievers? What was working for those guys?

AUSTIN FAWLEY: They threw all their pitches for a strike and think that's the main thing. Every pitch for a strike is going to be tough to hit him.

Q. For both of you guys, pretty scary collision there between Humphrey and Moreman in the second and third. Do you feel like that sort of moment, that adversity kind of rallied you guys and brought you guys together? You guys played lights out after that.

JUDD UTERMARK: Yeah, I think those are the two guys that we love in the locker room, and they're big parts of this team. Obviously you hate to see a collision like that. But yeah, I think there's a sense of rally around, and we know where we are and where our feet are and understand the importance of this game and how big it is to us, much less



Q. Mike, how is Ryan Moreman doing?

MIKE BIANCO: I don't know, I didn't see him until right after the game, and then you guys probably don't know but they pull you in a lot of different directions. Obviously a scary moment for everybody, especially when you get two guys go down. You never know. Bumped heads, concussion, and all kinds of injuries.

But at first, we weren't sure if it was some type of head injury, just because Ryan complained of his right knee, and then as he got up and started to move around it was his left knee.

I think it's one of those, it's pretty traumatic, guys running full speed in the moment, and he actually came out of the game because they just wanted to really check him out because they weren't really sure what was going on.

Isaac, on the other hand, again, I think it just jarred his shoulder and his right arm. I think it bothered him the rest of the game, but he toughed it out.

Don't know what tomorrow will bring for either one of those guys, but yeah, it's scary. I didn't have a good vantage point sitting in the dugout low. It looked like hump had a beat on it, I thought he was going to run it down, and then all of a sudden Ryan got in there and it's just one of those plays that we've seen so many times in baseball, guys just trying to make a play, and unfortunately those things happen.

Q. Coach, the ability to have yesterday off, how much did that help in bringing back your two relief pitchers and how did you think they performed?

MIKE BIANCO: They were terrific, and I think that's huge. We probably don't have Mason. I think McCausland got up a little bit on Wednesday, but we knew he'd be fresh today, but he could have pitched yesterday for sure. Spence certainly could have gone.

But Spence looked even better today. The ball had more life, a little more kick, more velocity, and sometimes that'll happen for those closers. Sometimes a long layoff is not great.

So to have a day off I thought meant a lot to our bullpen, especially those couple pieces in Morris and Spencer.

Q. With Hayden sliding in the outfield once that change happened, not sure how much it'll be necessary, but he's played in the outfield a little bit this season. What have you liked about Hayden in the

outfield?

MIKE BIANCO: He's terrific. He's a guy that we brought in last night for a defensive replacement. We're not worried about that part of it at all. But you're talking about guys that -- Moreman batted fifth today in the lineup, and Humphrey has batted against right-handers, he's batted in the middle of the lineup.

You're talking about guys that started just about every day in the outfield. I think they're going to be okay. I don't think it's anything super serious, but it was a collision, and tomorrow is less than 24 hours away, so we'll see. We'll get back to the hotel and see where they're at.

Q. Mike, you've talked this whole year about how maybe your offense has bailed you out of some of games, but when you look at the box score the last two games of the SEC tournament it's been your defense that's carried you, especially with two great pitching performances. How encouraging is that to see you guys playing this stellar defense knowing there's more baseball next week?

MIKE BIANCO: The truth of the matter is, and this is not trying to be sarcastic, I think early in the season, I think it's safe to say that we won games, especially in our league, offensively. We didn't pitch it as well. For whatever reason, it may have been a starting pitcher that certain week, may have been a bullpen piece, but we were kind of inconsistent on the mound.

But I think if you go back and you look, and I don't know the game, but if you go back and look the second half of conference play, we have been really good on the mound. Certainly there might have been a start or an outing that a guy wasn't as sharp.

But I think if you look at the numbers, the way our ERA has ticked down, now we are somewhere seventh eighth, and that's not great, but where we started from to get to that point this deep in the season means we've had a lot of good days like we've had today.

I think we're more consistent, and even with the big injury to B.J., we've been so much more consistent on the mound.

Q. How do you feel about today even with the pitching staff only allowing three walks, striking out 11 batters? How do you feel about your momentum tomorrow, whether going up against A&M or LSU?

MIKE BIANCO: Well, we'll figure that out, the opponent, obviously, here in a few hours. But we like where we're at.



Again, bullpen pieces, a lot of times that's day-of type of stuff. We'll see who's ready and who can perform.

But obviously because we've had the day off and because we've won and we've been really successful on the mound, there's a lot of guys in that dugout and that bullpen that haven't thrown yet.

We'll start Cade Townsend tomorrow. That's probably one of those beat writers' questions. Mason Nichols injured his oblique the past weekend. He's doing great, but going into the week and when we had to turn in the roster, we thought it just wasn't smart even though he was feeling good throughout the rehab.

I've watched him play catch the last couple days, which is really encouraging. But it's something that it wouldn't be smart to push him this week, just make sure that he's rested for the regional. So tomorrow we'll hand the ball to Cade Townsend.

Q. What does it mean to have your program back in postseason stages like this one given that you've been working the last couple years to earn these types of opportunities again?

MIKE BIANCO: Just proud of the guys. It's been a tough road the last couple of years for a lot of reasons, and you can look back and dissect it, and Lord knows we have with some of those guys sitting in front of me and everybody else.

But just proud, proud of the coaching staff that has hung in there. One of the things that hasn't probably been mentioned a lot, and it's really a shame, I think we're here for a lot of reasons, but none more than our three starters, Elliott, Maddox and Nichols, and our closer Spencer, four guys, all Mississippi guys. The three starters all were on that '22 team that won a national championship and all could have left last summer and gone to professional baseball and all chose to stay.

Old wins in college baseball, and old wins in the Southeastern Conference. When you return three SEC weekend starters, I don't know if anybody else does, has that in the Southeastern Conference.

Got three older guys on the mound, you hand the ball off in the ninth inning to -- I don't know, fifth, sixth, seventh year senior, whatever Spencer is, but I think that's a huge part of it. Just proud of those guys.

Then you look around and you've got three transfers in the outfield but old guys, old guys from power five schools that have had success. It's been a neat year for us, I think.

Really gratifying as the head coach because the culture has never left. The guys -- we may have not won enough games the last year or two, but the culture has been super, and for it to get to this point where we are, with all the things ahead of us, I think it's been really neat.

Proud of everyone but especially those guys that I mentioned.

Q. Quick question about Mason. Talk about his effectiveness and kind of what he means to your program.

MIKE BIANCO: Mason has been terrific, and at times arguably our best arm. A lot of contemplation, from the staff, the media, the fans of does he start, how do you use that.

But he's a little different than a lot of people, and because he's so special, not just stuff-wise but the ability to throw the ball into the strike zone, his competitiveness, it's a super weapon that we have out of the bullpen and really has made a huge difference, I think, on the weekend for us.

You've seen it the last two days. He's really, really good.

Q. With Riley Maddox specifically, six of his last eight starts he's been really, really good. What's clicked for him? What's been better the last couple months for him?

MIKE BIANCO: You know, Riley is such a great competitor and puts a lot on himself. He demands a lot from himself, and there's a huge expectation, I think, that he puts on himself.

He's good. You watched him last year, and he's had some really big games for us. But I think really the key for him, like most pitchers, like Austin just said, is just location. He's been able -- he's a guy that has control, the ability to throw strikes, but when you have command, which is really the ability to locate those pitches, four pitches, and he's really been able to do that.

When he does that, the stuff is really elite. It's a little different pitching sample than you see a lot of times where it's not a lot of four-seam balls up in the zone; it's a sinker, slider, cutter, changeup, and he had ride the four seam sometimes, but when he is able to pitch at the bottom of the zone, really locate, he's terrific.

That's a long answer, too. I think he's just really commanded it and hasn't made mistakes, and when he has he's been able to fight out of those mistakes and get

back into the zone, and sometimes that's the key to winning. It's not being perfect, it's can you minimize and get off the field and not let it blow up, and he's been really good at that.

Q. Have you talked with the team since being in Hoover about the chance of getting postseason baseball in Swayze, or is that something you steer away from?

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, we read Joe Healy's thing today and Wayward and all that stuff. We break it all down for the guys and what we have to do to host.

No. We have mentioned it, but we mention that those are things -- it's really coach-speak. I've said this several times: You can't hide them from that. It's like trying to get a teenager or somebody in their 20s to stay off social media. There's too much. There's too many of you guys. There's too many podcasts. There's too many internet sources.

I don't make fun of that. I'm just saying there's too much information out there, and it's hard to hide from.

So to make sure that they put it like anything else on social media, to put it in perspective, and at the end of the day, again, it sounds like coach-speak, but we only control when we run out there and does Riley deliver the pitch, does Judd get a good swing on a pitch that he can handle, does Fawley block a ball, does Cheng make a play at second.

You can only control the things that you can control. The rest of it is out of your control. It's difficult, much easier said than done, and I think especially in this day and age, for anybody, not just in college baseball and regionals and all of that, but that's not the recipe for success to run out on a field and think that you have to do something to be able to get something else, and you've heard it, don't get caught up in the results, get caught up in the process, and that's making pitches. A lot of what these guys have already said today, do that.

The mantra will be shower well tonight, put this game behind you, and try to play really good baseball tomorrow.

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