

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Saturday, May 24, 2025

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Tennessee Volunteers

Tony Vitello

Hunter Ensley

Postgame Press Conference



I just thought we showed more fight than we have the few weekends prior, so definitely going to carry that forward with us.

Q. Hunter, you said it was a productive week. What makes you think and feel that it was a productive week?

HUNTER ENSLEY: Yeah, you saw a bunch of guys get back on the mound, and I think Arvidson looked great this weekend. The first two games we were swinging it well. Execution was a lot better the first two games. Obviously, it's tough to say that right after this game. But we won two out of three, so for a weekend that's usually -- it's a productive week.

Q. Hunter, what made Bowker's pitches so deceiving that first time around, specifically with so much swing and miss stuff?

HUNTER ENSLEY: Bowker is the first guy, correct? Yeah, he's got good stuff. He's 92, 94, a lot of riding around on his fastball with a cutter and a slider and a changeup to go with it. He works ahead in the count and locates all four pitches. He's tough to hit.

Q. Also with Bowker's mechanics, how do you feel like you need to make adjustments next week heading into the regionals?

HUNTER ENSLEY: I mean, we'll kind of just see where we go from there. I'm not sure we'll see Bowker again next weekend, but if there's a guy similar to that, maybe work above the ball a little bit better and try and get it done earlier in the count.

Q. Seems like you're in good position to host next weekend. What would that mean to you to be able to play a couple more games at Lindsey Nelson?

HUNTER ENSLEY: It would be awesome. Obviously, love playing in that stadium. To be honest with you, it doesn't really matter whether we're home or away. I'm just looking

Vanderbilt 10, Tennessee 0

TONY VITELLO: Poor effort. Not what everybody woke up early for, but also hats off to Vanderbilt. They outplayed us today. A lot of things piled up for us, again, maybe bad itinerary by me leading into the game, but the guys were energetic going in.

The theme early was some ground balls, including the bunt. Getting past our guys, we maybe could have been quicker or made a better pitch, but Vanderbilt did what they needed to do offensively.

We had a couple innings where we could have done something, but did not. Just overall needed to be better in every area.

Q. Hunter, Tony talked to us the last few weeks about feeling like the process for this team has been pretty good and the results haven't followed. Obviously, not the result you wanted today, but the last two days, do you feel like just seeing the process leading into good results?

HUNTER ENSLEY: Yeah, I thought it was a productive week, just to be honest with you. I know today was pretty bad. Feel bad for the fans who made the drive down. But I thought we could take a lot of good stuff from this weekend. It'll be good to get off our feet for a couple days and get ready for this weekend.

Q. What do you take away from this weekend besides the loss? What do you take away from your other two games?

HUNTER ENSLEY: I thought we looked good against Bama on, I think it was, Wednesday, and then the fight against Texas two days ago was good for the team.

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forward to competing a few more times.

Q. Hunter, Tony has talked this week that you guys have been able to handle punches a little bit better. What was the difference in not being able to handle those punches today?

HUNTER ENSLEY: Yeah, maybe they landed a few too many of them. Couldn't really get things going offensively, and then it seems like stuff kind of just fell apart a little bit through the first seven innings. They played really well, executed a lot, and kind of just hit them where we weren't. Moving forward, I think we've just got to scratch a few runs in through the second or third inning and get back into it.

Q. You mentioned it was a poor effort and maybe some itinerary things that you would like to change. What would those things be if you could do it over again?

TONY VITELLO: Oh, I don't know. You're kind of looking for guys that are getting eye boogers out of their eyes when you're over there stretching at Hoover high. The guys were bouncing around and all energetic, but maybe it's the long week. Maybe it's the extra inning game against Texas, maybe it's the long season. I thought we were playing at one time, another. Maybe it was a great itinerary, maybe we just got beat. Anytime it doesn't go well, you want to reflect on it. It's easy to throw darts at things, but for us, we invest time in everything we're doing. And ahead of time, try and prepare the best way possible. And if it doesn't go well, you try and make adjustments, even if sometimes it is the right move and the right itinerary but you don't get the right outcome.

Q. Ben asked about hosting with Hunter there. Why do you think this team is deserving of a host seed, and what would that mean to have postseason baseball in Knoxville?

TONY VITELLO: Sure. I think it would be phenomenal for the fans to have another go-around. It was kind of a quirky year where timing of some things and weather of things just wasn't ideal, and then there were some times where we had an opportunity to entertain the fans, which is certainly not the goal, and it did not occur. They can be an advantage for us, too. We talked in the cages one time where we won I think it was a one-run game. Not easy to say a bunch of times. But they were an edge for us in that one in particular.

They've been that, too, in the few past years. I think it would be great for them. It would be great for our kids. We're not in control of it, so we'll let those people that are fully qualified sit in the room and diagnose that, but I think

the fact we came here and got two wins and racked up RPI -- I'd assume Texas and Vanderbilt are 1 and 2 or 3 or 4 in RPI and Alabama was a swing host team. We were able to beat them.

Florida was a swing host team. We were fortunate enough to beat them in the regular season and outlasted them here. Sour taste for everybody today, but Hunter pointed it out very well. The thing this team needs to do when we've got a three game set is win a series, and we're going to have to earn a right to have another series or three-game set because the regionals is a little different animal.

Like he said, these kids have played well on the road, but we'd like to play at Lindsey Nelson Stadium.

Q. You've talked about the last few weeks, the process being good but the process not following. How significant is it for this team to see the results go well this week, ahead of next week?

TONY VITELLO: I think it was beneficial for some individuals but also the team, to be able to rally behind in the second game, to come out ready after being on the road -- we've been on the road for a long time. It just didn't go well in Game 3 against Arkansas, another really good team.

Then two, just get some high fives going, but also get beat up a little bit, so you're not surprised by anything that you see, whether it's a guy that pitches quickly or a guy that's got good ride to his fastball as Hunter mentioned or a lefty doing this or that, bunt plays. We need to continue to get better as a team and prepare for whatever our assignment is, but our guys should feel like they've seen about everything.

Q. Vanderbilt scored 10 runs without an extra base hit. What makes their offense so challenging to deal with?

TONY VITELLO: The three games we played at our place were different. I think today, again, it was ground balls past us, but Ridgon, you know, slaughtered a ball up the middle. And then after that, they were able to accumulate some low line drives. It's a ballpark where as Gavin can attest to, again today, he slaughtered that ball even more so, and it got caught.

Probably low line drives and ground balls are going to benefit you, and they adjusted well and did that.

But they're kind of like every lineup in the SEC; you've got a guy in there that you wish didn't exist like Nelson. You've got a great athlete like Rustan, and then everybody kind of did their job. Our guys got off to a good start, swing and



miss pitcher and needed to do better in that situation.

Q. You mentioned earlier in the year against Vandy when they were running all over you, that pitchers needed to make some adjustments. A little bit better today holding guys on and being able to gun some people out, but they were still running on you. What have you seen from your pitchers and maybe cannon being able to get some guys out?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, in their defense, I thought in Arkansas it was much improved and it carried over. I don't know what the numbers say, but the last three days it was -- did they steal after Rustan got the first inning? That one wave off the board. You can look at the video; it rained before the game. Not that that had anything to do with the outcome. But it was a little tough going there in the first inning for cannon.

Q. You mentioned after the Texas game that right now, this team wasn't so much defending the SEC national championship title but pursuing. What do you want to see from them as you guys continue this road to do the same thing?

TONY VITELLO: I think to get eager to be better. There were some things that we needed to be better at. It's not a cop-out or an excuse, but there's some guys still getting comfortable with their positions, and when you get in these high-intensity games where a guy does this early in the count, but this with two strikes and guys are moving around, the more reps you get, you more comfortable you get at going to your right and doing this or communicating in this particular situation.

We need to review the areas that maybe we have been poor at more than once and cannot allow that to happen again. But just continue to make steady progress.

If you're fortunate enough, you tally up some more games, and there will be an opportunity to continue to do those things to get better.

Q. What are you seeing out of Tegan right now, and what adjustments would you like to see him make before next weekend?

TONY VITELLO: Yeah, I think I might have said it to -- I said it at some point and then was on the radio yesterday and they said, what's something to look for, and it was exactly what showed up today is lack of conviction to off-speed pitches. It's a dynamic fastball. It was one that was huge for him in high school ball and had him as a high draft candidate. Fortunately, he came to school. I'm certain he's not afraid to compete, but at the same time, if

you were to review today's game, there were a lot of pitches that were not thrown with conviction, the majority of them being off-speed pitches. Those guys were too good in the box, either if it was over the plate to make them pay or a lot of times we were just behind in the count. Ultimately we need to be ahead in the count like every pitcher, but I think the root of that is kind of that conviction deal.

Q. Having been through it now, what's your assessment of this new tournament format?

TONY VITELLO: What have the other coaches said? I don't know. That's a good question. I don't think the fan -- again, I don't have the numbers in front of me, so I don't think the fan attendance has been affected. It seems like the people are here to tailgate, yell at me, cheer for their team. So that's been good.

I'll be interested to see how it affects how many host teams we get and maybe how many more teams get in, yes or no.

Pitching saved and things like that. I think a little bit of an untold story. I think it's awesome that all kids got to experience it. We get run ruled today, probably it's karma that I'm always complaining about it, but to me if we're down like that we should have to wear it for two more innings and then also maybe be able to get some guys ready for next weekend and get some guys out there that -- our kids we put in late did an excellent job, and they won't forget those memories if they don't get to do it again.

We'll see. I've got no complaints with it. The city does an incredible job. It might be the best run tournament in the country, with all due respect to everything else that goes on after this or at the same time, and they're the best players. I know there's other great ones out there. But if you're a fan, rather than pay \$4,000 to go to a Braves game, just come here and watch the next whoever -- there's no Acuña out here, but there's some other ones that'll be up there.

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