

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Saturday, May 24, 2025

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Ole Miss Rebels

Mike Bianco

Will Furniss

Connor Spencer

Postgame Press Conference



To pitch in the ninth inning, game on the line, take me through that moment and what that final out was like for you?

CONNOR SPENCER: Yeah, it's awesome. Those are the kind of moments that I really live for as a closer. I feel like that's kind of where I thrive, the last three outs of the game.

It did get very loud with two outs and after I walked a guy. I couldn't really hear my pitch count. So I was trying to make sure I was throwing the right pitches before anything else.

But no, to do that, and especially against a really good team like that, it's awesome.

Q. Connor, I do want to ask you about this pitching staff. Unreal performances this week and really done well to close out the season. What's been different the last couple weeks, and how do you feel heading into the championship and also the rest of postseason?

CONNOR SPENCER: Yeah, we don't have to worry about school anymore, which helps a lot, so we really get to focus on just baseball.

I really think the biggest thing the pitching staff has kind of been doing lately is really, really hanging out together and just coming together for the most part.

We're always hanging out with each other even outside of the field, and we're not just teammates, we're buddies. I think that really helps for encouraging guys who whenever they do go out there, and you also get a realization for what makes people tick, and you can say the right things to them to get them in their right head space to go and compete the way they've been doing all week.

Q. Connor, you've been pretty busy the last couple of days. How much does adrenaline help you in this time of year and getting you ready? As a pitcher, what did you think of Cade Townsend today? Did you know that he had that kind of performance in him?

Ole Miss 2, LSU 0

MIKE BIANCO: Obviously another really good baseball game, I thought, by both teams. One of those pitching duels. I thought both teams pitched outstanding. We got a big home run by Will in the first and a couple hits in an inning with a big base hit by Smithwick to get us two. That usually doesn't do it. It's usually not enough.

But I really think the story of the game was us on the mound. Obviously a true freshman in Cade Townsend to pitch four and two-thirds against a very, very good offense in this environment, which is different than a lot of places, and especially conference tournaments.

It was loud there today, so for Cade to perform like that, his best outing of the year. We tried to prime him for that, a lot of mid-week starts, but nothing like that today. So for him to perform like that and then Spence at the end who's just been lights out.

Just proud of our guys, and rest up and get ready for another good team tomorrow in Vanderbilt.

Q. What was the pitch you recognized during your at-bat, and also just trying to help the offense with Mitchell and Luke striking out to start the game?

WILL FURNISS: I was actually sitting fastball, but he threw me a hanging slider, and I just saw it out of hand. He left it over the plate, and I just honestly tried to hit it hard. I didn't really think it was going to get out today because of the wind, but somehow it got out.

Q. Connor, like Mike was saying, there's a ton of LSU fans here. Everyone kind of saw purple everywhere.



... when all is said, we're done.®

CONNOR SPENCER: So Cade Townsend is my roommate on the road, actually. He's a little 19-year-old freshman, and I'm a 24-year-old senior. We get along well.

I've kind of talked to him about what I've learned in college and what's helped me, and to kind of almost feel like I'm his big brother and guiding him in a way that I feel if I had all this energy pent up the way he does, kind of just straighten him out and be able to kind of use that to go and perform the way he did.

I've seen it in him since the first day that I met him. He's always been one of my favorite little freshmen. Yeah, he's a really good dude and really competitive, too.

Q. Will, I think you said out there on TV that you've been on this program for three years but you said this team feels different. Can you expound on that a little bit?

WILL FURNISS: We're really together. The last couple years it doesn't seem like we've had a bunch of fight, and when we'd get down we'd just kind of give up or we'd ride the ups and downs too much. We don't stay even keeled.

This group is older and I think we're honestly tighter. When things go bad, we don't dip too low, and when things are going good, we don't go too high. I think that's the recipe for success, like Coach B says. Just a very mature group of guys, and we're all kind of like family. It's good to have this group with us.

Q. Will, with what Connor has done here in Hoover but also just all season, what sort of comfort does that bring an offense to have a guy like that coming out in the ninth?

WILL FURNISS: Oh, it's awesome. Offenses sometimes joke around, as long as we have the lead going into the ninth we're going to be good because we've got this guy in the bullpen. It's really comforting, especially seeing him jog out of the bullpen. "Enter Sandman" comes on; that's freaking sweet. It's cool. It's a cool song and it gets me pumped up, and I know it gets him pumped up, too, but not only that, he's really good up there. I don't really know many pitchers that can just throw fastballs and shove it down somebody's throat, especially the good teams that we face, but he can do it, and he does it every time.

Q. Mike, your thoughts on what Gunnar gave you today in the middle part of that game, maybe one of his better performances recently?

MIKE BIANCO: It really was. You know, that was a huge performance and probably gets lost in it. A lot of kudos to

Cade and the start which he deserves and of course Spence at the end. But the two guys in the middle were special, Gunnar and McCausland bouncing back from maybe a rough outing yesterday. I thought he was really sharp. Big changeup today, which we felt would work well against that lineup, at least if we could get five, six outs from him.

Sometimes the plan doesn't go quite like you planned it, but today it did. We were hopeful to get Townsend four or five, let him handle some adversity out there, not go too quick to the pen, but we wanted to go left-handed after that and kind of switch it up a little bit, and obviously wanted to go to a veteran guy like Dennis. I thought he was terrific.

Q. What was the message to these guys the last couple weeks to get this pitching staff rolling and really here in Hoover?

MIKE BIANCO: Well, you know, obviously the credit goes to the players. They're the ones out there throwing and performing.

But a lot of credit has got to go to Joel Mangrum. We said it yesterday in the press conference here, how well we've pitched it down the stretch, and not even down the stretch, like a week or two, but how strong we've been on the mound the second half of conference play on both sides from the starting pitchers to the bullpen and even with an injury to Braden Jones; we've been able to sustain that.

They just continue to get better and better. I think Spence is real sincere in that they're close, they pull for one another, and that's neat. There's a lot of guys in baseball that that staff you're going to hand the ball off to a lot of different people, and knowing that you have each other's back sometimes makes the biggest difference in the world.

Q. Your team has knocked off two of the best teams not only in the SEC but in all of college baseball. What was the message to the group after another big win, three in the last four days?

MIKE BIANCO: Well, we just want to continue to play well. I know it sounds like coach-speak, but it's really not about who you're playing. We feel we're pretty good, as well, and when we play well, we can play with anybody in the country.

One of the things that we've talked about for a long time now is can we play consistently well over a period of time. Baseball is a tough game to do that. But this team has done it now for a few weeks.

Q. Mike, what did you think of LSU's pitchers there,



particularly the last two?

MIKE BIANCO: They were terrific. I thought they pitched it well. When you look at this game after them pitching their 1 and 2 yesterday, to go what they did, and really it's a home run and a couple base hits spaced between an error, that's the only two runs of the game.

They pitched -- we win, we get a lot of credit for the way we pitched it, but man, they pitched it just as well as we did.

Q. Cade Townsend has had his ups and downs this year. What gave you the confidence to put him on this sort of stage? Is it the stuff or is it the temperament, a combination of both?

MIKE BIANCO: I think it's everything. It's tough; this league is tough for freshmen. It's tough for anybody, but it's especially tough for freshmen, and to come in with the high expectations that Cade did, and we've talked about this throughout the year, certainly it's not hard to see the stuff when he goes out there.

But just to be consistent, and when you watch him week in and week out on those Tuesdays, and he's pitched well, but usually it's an inning that gets him. It's not that he can't handle the moment. It's not that he's not good enough to do this at its highest level on the weekend against a top-5 team, but can you make a pitch and get off the field, and he did that a couple times today in a big environment, tough environment.

For that, we're really proud of him because that's the growth that you're seeing. The guy that you expect one day he's going to be a weekend starter, Friday night starter in the Southeastern Conference.

Q. How did you feel about Austin's performance today behind the dish and how he pretty much helped the pitching staff out today with the shutout win?

MIKE BIANCO: Yeah, he's terrific. I don't know if it was the 17th, something like that, home run yesterday. He was sitting up here, and we're certainly glad for all of those 17 home runs. But it goes really unnoticed.

That's kind of the catching position. The catchers are usually the offensive linemen. People really don't notice them unless they miss a ball or something bad happens. But if you watch him throughout the game, the 150 pitches that he catches every game and how many balls he blocks, how many strikes that he gets us and doesn't -- he's as good as anybody in the country at receiving, meaning getting balls called strikes and keeping strikes strikes. He does it very, very well.

Then you saw his arm today. He's been outstanding all year long.

Q. The players cited their closeness, but from your angle what do you think has contributed to the rise of this program's experience this year after the last two years have gone, to be back where you guys are at now?

MIKE BIANCO: I said it yesterday, I think it starts with the older guys, especially the four Mississippi guys, Spence included. But along with Elliott, Maddox and Nichols, four old guys that could have been drafted and sign and moved on last year decided to come back. Three of them have a national ring. Three of them were in that dugout in Omaha in '22.

I think the last couple years have left -- with a lot of people, but a real bitter taste in their mouth, and they didn't want to go out that way. They've made it their mission because in '22 they were freshmen. Now they're the old guys.

So I credit them with the great leadership, but then also a lot of other guys, Fawley and Moerman and Humphrey and Sanford and other guys that came from other programs that have meshed into this culture and this team, and not only have been great teammates but also have showed leadership, and leadership comes in a lot of different ways.

I've said it yesterday, that older teams win in our league. This is an old team.

Q. With what Will and Connor said about this team just finding a closeness that's been fostered, what examples of that do you see, and what about that is so beneficial for a tournament like this or the NCAA Tournament, that kind of chemistry?

MIKE BIANCO: You know, chemistry, leadership, those are essential to success, but a lot of times those are questions usually answered at the end. As you know, our beat writers, a lot of people ask about that in the fall. In the fall, everybody plays and you don't win or lose. But in the spring, all of a sudden you only have nine or ten guys playing. You have 40 men on your roster, so that means 75 percent of the guys aren't in that lineup today.

So once that starts to happen, you start to see what kind of team you have, and through the adversity, when you saw example, the best example I can give you we haven't always been our best this year, there's been games that we'd like to take back, there's been weekends that we'd like to take back. But we never hit a stretch where we were just bad.



We've seemed to always recover. One of the mantras of the year has been shower well, and what that means, it's a metaphor for win or lose today, shower well and let that win, let that loss go down the drain and show up tomorrow, it's a new day.

This team has been able to really buy into that. This team that even when we haven't been at our best, and I think Will said it, they never seem too down. They're excited to win, certainly excited after tonight's game, but they'll be the same team tomorrow morning in the meetings, same team tomorrow in batting practice, and those teams seem to find success more often.

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