

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Thursday, May 21, 2026

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Alabama Crimson Tide Coach Rob Vaughn Justin Lebron

Postgame Press Conference



Florida - 13, Alabama - 3 (8)

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Alabama head coach Rob Vaughn and Justin Lebron.

ROB VAUGHN: Obviously not the way we wanted today to go, right? Peterson, this is the third time we've seen Peterson in the last two years, and by far the best version we've seen of him the last two years. I mean, the stuff was real. Tons of strikes.

We had a couple of opportunities there in the early innings to get a two-out hit and maybe get some momentum on our side. And he executed some pitches and just wasn't quite able to do that. And the momentum obviously shifted there in the fifth inning. Couldn't quite get off the field. And you felt the momentum get in there in the dugout, and then it was kind of a snowball rolling downhill after that.

Those guys are playing high-level baseball right now. They're playing well. Obviously we saw them early in the year as well and played incredibly well against them then. Just kind of ran into a buzz saw a little bit. That was, Liam Peterson was the Big Leaguer that I knew he was.

Unfortunately, the first two outings, we didn't quite get that version of him. Today we did.

Gotta give credit to Florida for coming out and being really good today and getting after it.

At the end of the day we turn our attention to next week and everything that comes with that. And, so, excited for this journey with this group to continue.

Q. After sweeping Florida in the regular season, do you think the team had the right mindset going into today's game?

JUSTIN LEBRON: No doubt. Like Coach said, I feel Liam pitched very well today. I think in the moments we needed to capitalize, we just didn't do that today. Just credit to him and just go back and back to the drawing board and just focus on those things.

Q. Not holding what lies ahead for a few months of your future, but how do you feel like the group of the guys that you've seen since the fall or other newcomers that have been adapting to the Crimson Tide program, what does it mean to be with certain guys during this time span and what lies ahead next week in the Regionals?

JUSTIN LEBRON: It means the world, honestly. I've been around some pretty exciting people to play with. Like Brady Neal and Bryce Fowler. I mean these are my best friends. We're all pretty excited for what's ahead to come. We're going to grind, and we're just going to get back and see what we got to do.

Q. We've seen y'all end seasons with some hot streaks past couple years. How do you begin to translate that (indiscernible) the SEC Tournament in the postseason?

JUSTIN LEBRON: I think it just starts really just in practice. And just going back and just seeing what we can do and just really starting there and just believing in ourselves.

We know we're good enough. We've shown that time and time again this year, and just really trusting in each other and trusting in ourselves.

Q. How do you make sure these guys just hit reset, one game, get ready to go for the NCAA Tournament?

ROB VAUGHN: I mean, that's what the beauty of a 55-game, 56-game schedule does for you. If you look back at this group, we've been bloodied up and punched in the mouth before.



And a lot of the local reporters in here that cover our stuff back in Tuscaloosa, they've heard me say it time and time again, that I think the challenges and the frustrations and the losses that we've had at times this year, this group has responded as any group I've ever coached when that happens.

You look at back-to-back seven-game win streaks in the SEC. Like, that doesn't happen in this league and these guys have done that twice. And it's usually coming on the heels of kind of getting punched in the mouth.

So this group's battle tested, they're calloused, they're hardened. When you can roll out three starting pitchers like we can, that can really extend the season as we go into this.

I think this group, obviously, we wanted to play better today. I thought the mindset was right. I thought everything was good today. We ran into a buzz saw. I mean, Liam was something else today.

I referenced it back home when we played him before the season that we were facing a Big Leaguer. And we got him then. But God bless, man. That guy was a pretty darn good version of himself today. It was good stuff. It was no balls. I mean he didn't put a guy on for free, and he's touching 100 still in his last inning with two different breaking balls and mixing a change-up there late.

I mean he was the difference maker in this game. And then they got a couple big two-out hits there in the fifth that really kind of blew this thing open and flipped it to their side.

But this group will be just fine. They're battle-tested. They're hardened and they're tough. They are all those things. So let's turn our attention on Monday and see who the heck's coming Tuscaloosa.

Q. How do you think the two home runs that Florida hit in the fourth inning kind of impacted things?

ROB VAUGHN: Honestly I thought -- that's happened at times, right? Like, solo homers don't beat you. At the time, like, shoot Lawson got into that one. Then I think it was Surowiec. I don't remember who hit the other one. I think it was Surowiec. Just two really good swings out of those guys.

But you're sitting there 2-0 and we had had some guys on base and some opportunities. Those homers weren't really the game changer. It was really what happened there in the fifth. You got a chance to get off the field, you get almost a ridiculous play with Braun (phonetic) and Holt, like

wild.

But leadoff single, fly-out, ground-out, you're sitting there with two guys on base or nobody on base, two outs. And then we just couldn't get quite off the field. They get a big two-out hit, which like even then you're like, okay. Jones (indiscernible) unfortunate kind of flips it in there.

But even there you're sitting there 4-0. Like, the game is still firmly where you want it at 4-0. You're not really flinching too much there. Then it was the next couple plays, just not able to get off. We kind of, I don't know if Brady had a tough time seeing it and I'm not sure if he just had a bad read on it. I'm not 100 percent sure. But obviously the triple followed up by the error that scored some home runs just blew it open on their side a little bit. And that's where the game changed.

The homers I didn't think affected anything. That's part of the game. We responded to that plenty of times. We just couldn't quite get off the field there in the fifth.

Q. Having a veteran lineup, one through nine, what's it like to be with these guys, coach them throughout this season? And how Jason and Mike and Anthony have been a big help for you guys as a coaching staff?

ROB VAUGHN: I mean I love my guys. My coaching staff, it sounds cliché, I hate sitting up there saying, hey, we're all best friends. That sounds so corny. But it's a great group of men. It really is. And the job Jason Jackson has done this year with this pitching staff is absolutely remarkable. I mean he has done an incredible, incredible job of getting those guys ready to go.

And there's no secret. That's been the one consistent piece of this team this year is what he's done with that staff, particularly those three starters.

I think the staff feels the same way about this team. This team is a fun team to be around every day, because they're tough, they put the work in, they play hard. And, man, they've been through some ups and downs. Kobe Bryant said in his retirement thing, right, it's about the journey. That's the piece.

I think this group's got a lot of baseball left in front of them but this is a group I'm going to remember for a long time not because they're strictly done special things on the field. They have. I mean 18 SEC wins, finishing fourth in the league, setting yourself up to do some really special things for the next two weeks.

But what I'm going to miss most about them is the people they are. And being able to show up and work with Bryce

Fowler every day and being anal to show up and work with Brady Neal and Justin Lebron and Jason Torres -- and you can go up and down the line -- Tyler Fay, Zane Adams, Matt Heiberger. It's just such a joy to be around those guys every day. And they're giving this university every ounce of who they are. We're fortunate that they're here, and we're hoping we got a month of baseball still in front of us.

Q. Florida's had 30 hits the last two games. What's the difference in that lineup that you've seen from the first series to now?

ROB VAUGHN: Well, I was hoping fay was going to make some type of history and no-hit him a second time in a row. That would have been fun. They were actually funny when they got the first hit, they were screaming for the ball. It was actually pretty funny.

But I think part of it is health. I think you look at it and obviously getting Lawson back and healthy -- Lawson missed most of that series against us. And that dude is a special, special hitter.

But this game's so momentum-based, so momentum-based. And you have a team that's playing good baseball right now, and you know they've just continued to get better.

It's the Kevin O'Sullivan factor, right. That's what his team always does. That's a reason he's one of the best in the business of this, is the last couple of years they've had kind of slow starts out of the gate, and it seems like he hasn't planned right this time of year.

Our team's really no different. Our boys are playing at a high level baseball this time of year too. It boiled down to a couple plays there in the middle. And like I said snowball rolling downhill.

But, man, Sully's great for a reason. He's won so many baseball games for a reasonable. He's got those boys playing right at the right time.

I think a lot of it for them is just very honestly getting healthy. Caden McDonald and the emergence of him and what he's become for them, I think he had maybe a pinch-hit against us there. But that guys playing high level baseball too.

I think they're healthy. I think they're confident. I think they're playing good baseball, just like we are, and I think that team's going to be really dangerous when the postseason kind of rolls around to the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Obviously credit Liam's performance. But with 14 strikeouts, is there any approach or an adjustment you'd like to see with your batters' approach at the plate?

ROB VAUGHN: I honestly thought that the bats off Liam, I thought, were pretty darned good. I mean, when you're throwing 100 with two different breaking balls and commanding stuff, like, go get them, right? It's going to be tough. There's just nothing for free there. And they played good defense behind him.

And we just couldn't quite get that big hit early. And I don't know if we gave them away. I didn't love some of our at-bats on McDonald. And that's nothing against him. I mean, just punching out, looking at fastballs away or things you can't do. And we gotta fight a little bit tougher in those.

So against Peterson, no, I was fine with the way we competed there. That guy's going to get his punches when he had the stuff that he had today. We needed to make McDonald work a little bit harder. And I thought we made it a little bit too easy for him.

So that's the piece we've got to be better at, is kind of that point of the game right there.

Q. What's the difference you see in this year's team heading into the regional versus last year's at this exact same time before heading to Hattiesburg?

ROB VAUGHN: I mean, I think part of it is what this group has been through. I think last year's team, we didn't have the highs that this team has had. This team's won six SEC weekends. We've swept four of them I believe. We've won 18 games. And this team's just battle-tested.

Like, last year's group, we didn't get swept last year, which was great. It's cool. But at the end of the day, we also didn't do some of the special things that we've done this year.

I think this group is just, they're confident and I think they believe in each other. And I think obviously the three dudes on the front have been good. Obviously you miss a guy like Riley Quick from last year, that guy was pretty special. But all those guys have gotten better. Tyler Fay's a better version of himself right now than he was last year.

Zane Adams is a better version of himself. Myles Upchurch is a young phenom that's emerged as a young superstar for us. I think when you can run three starters out like that, that gives you a chance against anybody. And they give you a shot.

So I think this group's battle-tested, I think. They're ready for what lies in front of them next week. So I'm excited for it.

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