

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Friday, May 22, 2026

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Arkansas Razorbacks

Coach Dave Van Horn

Gabe Gaeckle

Camden Kozeal

Postgame Press Conference



hit it hard. I always have an attainable goal to go up there and help the team win and hit the ball hard. Keep the game simple, especially towards the end of the year.

Q. Gabe, Coach was in here and saying he thought you did a really good job of landing your fastball at the bottom of the strike zone and working your slider off of it. How would you assess what went well for you tonight?

GABE GAECKLE: I was able to throw all my pitches for strikes and land the off-speed when they were probably hunting the fastball. So that worked out for me.

Q. Gabe, how much fun is it as a pitcher watching the ball fly out of the ballpark off your team's bats the way it has?

GABE GAECKLE: It's awesome. Really the past, I don't know, few weeks the offense has been incredible. So it's awesome being able to go pitch out there with a lead.

Q. We were talking yesterday about you hitting here and you said that you like hitting in this ballpark. What do you like about it?

CAMDEN KOZEAL: I think it's a cool ballpark. I think it's a really fun tournament to play in. You get to play some teams maybe you haven't played in the regular season. Tennessee and Texas, we never played 'em. So you get to face new pitchers and just go out there and play and have fun. It's win or go home, so you go out there balls out and compete.

Q. What did you see that Eaves did well to get you out of that jam in the first inning whenever he had to warm up so quickly?

GABE GAECKLE: Yeah, I wasn't watching too much. I was getting loose. But throwing strikes like he always does. Mixing. He's been outstanding for us the whole year, so it was good to see.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the

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THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the players only.

DAVE VAN HORN: What a great job by Steele Eaves and Gabe Gaeckle. I mean, just an amazing job. When your starter takes one off the shin, plus he was already sick, and we didn't know if he was going to give us but one or two innings anyway. Found out he was sick about five minutes before the game started. And he gets hit in the shin and we were concerned about that, obviously. Just a gutsy performance by our bullpen. Gave some guys a chance to rest. Three or four really big swings for us and some good at-bats. Texas pitching is awfully good, struck us out a lot. But Gaeckle made sure that that lead held up for us.

Q. Cam, you're having a really good tournament so far, what's been different this weekend that maybe you haven't been doing during the regular season? What's been different this weekend?

CAMDEN KOZEAL: Just seeing the ball, just trusting teammates, just trying to score runs. It's the time of year where I think being the more aggressive team will win, and we just want to keep playing.

Q. What does it mean to have guys like Carter, and just how he can be a big help for you guys down the stretch? And alongside hitting two home runs, now you have 28 home runs on the year, I mean, what were the mechanics you felt like that has helped you improve from the fall and just heading into now?

CAMDEN KOZEAL: Yeah, just keeping the game simple, not trying to do too much, just see the ball, be on time, and

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student-athletes and take questions for Coach.

Q. That home run by Cam, it said it was 449 feet. Have you ever seen a ball hit like that here?

DAVE VAN HORN: No. I don't know if it was coming down when it hit that speaker out there. It was smoked. His first hit you were kind of going, wow, is that going to get out of here? Because it's hard to hit the ball out dead center here. And it just kept right on going.

That was a huge swing for us, especially since we just lost our starting pitcher. The first home run, he stayed behind the ball and it floated out of the park. Then we get the big single that made it a three-run lead. That was a huge swing too. But that swing, that was a momentum changer right there, in my opinion.

Q. When it's going well for Gabe, what's happening and when it doesn't go as well, what's your view of it?

DAVE VAN HORN: Well, like tonight, that was about as good as it can go, really. I mean, I looked up a couple times early his first inning -- and I'm a little superstitious, I don't want to know how hard they're throwing. But one just kind of jumped out of his hand, so I glanced to the left, and I'm like, oh, my goodness. It said 97. I hadn't seen that this year. It was right around the zone too. It might have been a strike.

But good change-up. He's pitching off that fastball, but he kind of pitched backwards too. He pitched off that breaking ball is what I saw. They started trying to sit on something off-speed and he started zipping 'em. When he's not going good, he's behind in the count 1-0, 2-0, 2-1. You can't live like that with these hitters. So that was really good version. If we get that next weekend, we'll be in good shape.

Q. Obviously weren't anticipating the pitcher getting hit. What was the conversation like between you and Hobbs when you went to the mound? Was the righty the next in line?

DAVE VAN HORN: Probably more than anything, the conversation was please don't be broken. I mean, the game's the game. We want to win, but we also want to be able to have him available next week. You know, after a minute, I just said, Who do you want to go with? He said, Eaves. And the thing about Steele, he was -- I don't even -- he wasn't at the ballpark the other day because he was sick. We sent him home.

Tonight, Dietz was sick. We didn't know until right before the game started. Those two were rooming together. We took Dietz and got him his own room two days ago, so he

wasn't going to be around it. But he might have been around it too much.

You know, we've been in a hotel 10 nights in a row now, and it's been fun.

Q. Last two or three years in particular, when you think about your program, you always have big pitching moments in the postseason. How much trust do you have in a guy like Gabe or Steele who came in? Could you talk about your pitchers.

DAVE VAN HORN: Yeah, with Gaeckle, he's been there. He's had some really good days, he's had some disappointing days. He's fighting himself a little bit. Now that he's a junior, he's coming to the end with us. I got all the confidence in the world in him. I mean, if it goes good, great. If it doesn't, he's a guy that I feel like deserves to be out there. But I see it going good.

Q. Does Helfrick adapting to everything else happening the way it did, Dietz left the game. How do you feel that Ryder has been a big help to you guys for the pitching staff alongside the other catching duties?

DAVE VAN HORN: He's been an amazing catcher, great leader of those pitchers and the staff. And he's struggling a little bit right now offensively. He's frustrated. But he doesn't let it really affect his defense or how he talks to the pitchers or how he acts. Now, from the time he makes an out until he gets back to the dugout he's frustrated, but he let's it go and he does his job.

We're just hoping that -- I've seen him hot. He's flipped that switch. And he could really, really help us. But he's been an amazing leader and he's running that pitching staff.

Q. Three games in a row where you guys have really gotten off to a good start in the first inning. Has there been a common theme that you've seen in those first innings? What do you think you're doing well out of the gate?

DAVE VAN HORN: I don't know. You know, we got off to -- we played a really bad game against Kentucky in Game 2. I think we won, what -- what did we -- I can't remember. Lost Game 1, that was the game. And I told the team after the game, I said, that was a waste of three hours. We wasted, we could have done anything else, but that was a waste of time. Took forever to get going. We had nine outs -- it was bad. I said, When are we going to start doing something early? Why don't you guys get it going early. You never now how it's going to affect us, but we have kicked it into gear a little bit. It usually takes a walk or

somebody makes a big swing. You can't project that we're going to score nine runs before we make an out in Game 3 against Kentucky. And here it's been big swings, home runs. We didn't expect that to happen all the time. I think the guys have -- we're just getting better. We got 17 Quad 1 wins. Does anybody know that? Nobody knows that. We got 17. Who is got 17? UCLA? Arkansas? Georgia? Is that about right?

Q. Georgia Tech.

DAVE VAN HORN: Georgia Tech. Okay. So we have a pretty good team, we played a pretty tough schedule. We just played some teams that just didn't do well after they left our place, whatever. I mean, that's 19 SEC wins now. 7 out of 10 series we won. It's a pretty good team.

Q. Two years ago set the record for the tournament with 46 home runs. I think we're at 34 through 11 games. What's going on with this power surgery?

DAVE VAN HORN: That's such, that's a hard question. I mean, I think that the wind was -- until the wind went down and it got night -- during the day the ball's really traveling. You're dealing with some really physical players these days in this league, and probably all over the country. Older kids, physical kids. I think more kids are going to college for a little bit instead of signing. Kids are big and they're strong. I don't know. You could say it's the bat, you could say it's the ball, you could say the pitching is not as good. I don't know. It's just, the ball's flying right now here.

Q. You mentioned earlier about walks and base hits and jump starting your offense. You had five or six walks tonight. Talk about your patience, your hitters' patience behind the plate, maybe when they get ahead in the count and they wait on that pitch, and maybe it doesn't come and they just take a walk.

DAVE VAN HORN: That's what you have to do. That's called hitting. Otherwise you're just swinging. Swinging doesn't work. You got to have a little bit of a plan. We walked five times, we had three doubles tonight, a couple home runs, we put together a couple good innings, we pitched it great. It was a good winning formula. Some nights it's seven walks -- I think we got hit by three pitches today too. So we took advantage of some of that. But it's different from game to game. You got to be able to win different ways. You got to be able to bunt, hit, run, steal. We stole 80-plus bases now this year. We hit 80-plus home runs. Like I said a minute ago, we're not bad.

Q. You mentioned some of your resume pieces, RPIs the limiting factor right now. Some years it helps you, some years it hurts you. How do you feel about the

RPIs role in the process?

DAVE VAN HORN: I don't know, I have mixed emotions on it. It's not easy to get to Fayetteville, Arkansas. Teams, I don't blame 'em, why would you want to -- it's hard to get to us. So we play more in-state schools now. It's hard to travel when you're an SEC coach and you're putting together a schedule. It's hard to go play on the road on Tuesdays when you got to go play at Ole Miss or you got LSU coming in and you need to rest a little bit. And everybody's got their battles. But RPI, you got to depend on these teams, got to schedule 'em two years out. And then maybe they don't have a good year. You might beat 'em a couple times. We talk about this all the time. We played Stetson in March. Stetson had a good team. We beat 'em the first two games. We needed to win one more and we didn't, they beat us twice. And we thought they would really take off. And not winning that one game just killed us. If we would have won one more game against that team. And then they haven't, they're not playing .500, they didn't play good, I don't know what happened. But it just feels like one weekend in March has really affected us. So I have not answered your question. I don't know what to say, honestly.

Q. What did Gabe do -- I mean, I know he was big, him going the distance the way he did once he came in. But how does that set you up for tomorrow, and do you know what you're going to do pitching-wise tomorrow?

DAVE VAN HORN: We don't know who we're starting yet. We'll talk to Coach Hobbs and we'll discuss it. Obviously if Dietz would have thrown five to six today, and we would have had that lead, we would have gone to somebody else and we would have started Gaeckle tomorrow if we win. But I told coach, you know, they have a good offense, we know who is in that bullpen waiting to come in, and if they start making a run, then, you know -- we just decided, let's just pitch. So to answer your question, I'm not sure. But we do have guys that pitched the other day that will now be available. We can piece it together. Whoever we start, probably won't plan on pitching 'em very long.

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