

Southeastern Conference Baseball Tournament

Saturday, May 23, 2026

Hoover, Alabama, USA

Hoover Metropolitan Stadium

Georgia Bulldogs

Coach Wes Johnson

Tre Phelps

Kenny Ishikawa

Postgame Press Conference



Georgia - 8, Florida - 7

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from Coach.

WES JOHNSON: We've got Tre Phelps here just in case somebody wanted him. But he was All SEC as well. So that's fine. It's fine.

Guys, to start off with the game, obviously, Florida came out and got a really good punch in on us. I thought Dylan Vigue actually threw the ball fine, left a few balls out over the plate. Tip your hat, they got off a couple of swings on some fastballs that we left in the middle of the zone, and that's what good teams and good players do.

I thought we were able to persevere. You look out at Zach Brown coming in the game really calming the game down for us, keeping it right there. And we have a motto that we try not to panic at any time, and I just kept telling our guys, Just stay with the process. We just need to keep it right here.

I think Caden Aoki did a really good job of that, and then Justin Byrd coming in and closing out. From an offensive side of things, I think we just leaned on 'em a lot all day. We got off some really good at-bats. We actually won a game and didn't homer. It's just a running joke at our -- within our locker room.

But at the end of the day, we took our singles. Kenny had a really good day. Ryan Black. Tre Phelps getting off a professional at-bat right there. We needed to get the ball to the outfield with a runner at third in less than two. He did. We tagged up and was able to tie the game with that.

So, yeah, all in all just really proud of our guys for hanging in there and not panicking and staying with our approach and the way we do things.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players.

Q. Coach talked about not panicking. What was the message to your other teammates when you started making that rally, the rain delay happened, and it looked like from the two dugouts, you guys were still excited and ready? What changed and what was the message to each other?

TRE PHELPS: I think it's just a sense of us all being excited to play with each other. We haven't been this far in this game in a long time, so just being able to be where our feet are and just enjoy it. Obviously, we had a rain delay and knowing that could either go one way or another. So just being able to come out punching. We had some great at-bats right after the rain delay, and then to be able to go into the bottom of the 8th and put together an inning like that with the bottom of the lineup and have the top come through is special.

Q. Kenny, following up on that, you guys have been in this situation a few times where you had to come back. Talk us through what the conversation is like in the dugout when you're behind. Coach mentioned it as well. Just what you guys kind of talk about and how do you keep yourselves up and going when things look bad at first?

KENNY ISHIKAWA: Well, we were down six early. We weren't really panicking. Coach always tells us not to panic. We're the Dogs. We win on the home or the road, either way. We stayed calm. To be fair, I was really pissed off at myself the at-bat before because I struck out, but I knew I was still going to get another AB, so I flushed it, stayed locked in, and yeah, I was able to get that hit, so, yeah, that was pretty cool.

Q. Kenny, what was the sequence of just the bottom of the 7th inning coming out of that rain delay? How did you feel like just expanding the zone with just the

approach of everything else and also the ABS element the first time around the SEC?

KENNY ISHIKAWA: Well, the ABS challenge is really tough because, I mean, you really get emotional too at the same time. I'm not a huge fan of it, but just staying locked in even though the rain delay. We had DJ on the base -- on base before the rain delay, so we already knew that we were going to have to score some runs after the rain delay. So me and Lujo just stayed locked in and we were able to make that inning a big one.

Q. Kolby and Tre, the bottom of the lineup was huge and then that last turn there in the lineup, what were you guys seeing from Whritenour from the mound that allowed you to execute, led to you, and then ultimately Dan's sac fly?

TRE PHELPS: I hate calling it the, per se, bottom of our lineup. Kolby has 17 homers, 15 homers every year. Black is hitting .300 with almost 10 homers. So I hate calling it the bottom. I just say that's just where we happen to be. You had a guy that was up there, had a good fastball, had a good cutter and what we've been seeing all fall and spring, and just trusting ourself and getting in the box and going in and battling and getting our swings off at the strikes and taking the balls and it went our way.

Q. Tre, talk about -- obviously coming out of the rain delay you get the runs and then your pitcher goes back out there and shuts 'em down. From a confidence standpoint was that kind of a realization of we've got 'em right where we want 'em.

TRE PHELPS: 100 percent to have a pitcher come out and just mow it after sitting 45 minutes, and you don't even know if you're going to come in the game at that point. Aoki was sitting for so long, so to have Byrd come in and just pitch how he's been pitching all year was definitely special. And then we all knew we just need to put together good at-bats like we've been doing all year at that critical point of the game and pull it out. I mean, we walked once today and put up eight runs, so that's what I'm more excited about.

Q. Now that you got this win over Florida, your team faces the first-ever SEC tournament championship in school history. Is there a lot of talk about that or is that how do you kind of dial down those emotions?

TRE PHELPS: It's definitely exciting. We've been playing a lot of, I feel, what would be emotional games all year. Going on the road playing in five tough environments and playing tough teams coming to us and playing like a team like Tech in Truist. So I would say I think the emotions will

be inside no matter where we are, just being able to play with a focus and know that it's going to be a big game, it's just who is going to be able to focus longer.

THE MODERATOR: All right, we'll take questions for coach.

Q. What's the message to the team after a game like that?

WES JOHNSON: Yeah, I mean, look you covered us a lot all year. We got another game tomorrow. It's still baseball. What's different I think in our sport than any other sport that you cover or whatever, we have got to show up tomorrow, the score doesn't roll over, emotions don't roll over. It's a really long game, you can't panic, you can't get too emotional at times, it will take you out of your approach. So that was the message again: We got another one tomorrow. And as I've said about this team, they really like playing, they love to compete, and that's what we're going to try to do tomorrow.

Q. I know tomorrow -- not sure you'll have enough pitchers tomorrow. Have you decided on who is going to start tomorrow?

WES JOHNSON: No, I feel good with our pitching. I don't know who we're going to start yet tomorrow. I'll get back with the staff and we'll run through it. And it kind of may even have to do with who wins this game here that's going on right now. But we feel good with our pen. I think we got a lot of guys who are going to be ready to throw, haven't been in some games and have been wanting to get in games. So I'm excited to come to the yard and see how they do tomorrow.

Q. Talk about Byrd's appearance there to really go down there, shut things down, to put your offense back out there on the field.

WES JOHNSON: Yeah, I thought Justin was electric today. When I see his fastball, it had some really good ride on it today. Because someone was asking in the post game about some other people about he had, you know, you went at him with fastballs with Justin. Well, when I see he's got that kind of carry, and that kind of velocity, we're going to attack with his fastball, it plays really, really good. And he's a strike thrower. You look at him, he's going to attack. We went to the slider some, really didn't go to the change-up much at all because I think maybe we threw two or three, I'm trying to recall. But it was pretty much fastball, slider today, and that's all he needed. When you get into those situations, Florida's already kind of shown us throughout the game they're going to swing early. Which that's fine, that's a good plan, whatever. You want guys

who attack in the zone. And just because they're swinging early doesn't mean you throw fastballs, it just means you need to locate 'em. As you saw, like Vigue threw some good fastballs, he just didn't locate 'em well and they got to him.

Q. You talk about this week about how your team loves to play. But what makes this team so different from other teams you coached, and also what's the message to your guys heading into playing for the first-ever school tournament championship?

WES JOHNSON: This tournament, depending upon where you're at, it can really be tough, right? Sometimes you come into it -- I look at my first year when I was at Georgia here, I mean, we were really beat up. And it's hard to stay here a long time knowing that what you've got in front of you. I think the difference in this team is, well, knock on wood, we're healthy. And when you're healthy and you've got arms and you've got options and they're healthy, then it's fun to stay here and play and you want to try to play as long as you can and that's been our guys' mindset.

Q. Having two walks and nine strikeouts for your pitching staff today, how has Jackson been a big help this week? And also going back to the Florida series in April, what adjustments you felt from that series on losing two out of three and just seeing what lies ahead for tomorrow?

WES JOHNSON: Yeah, I'll start with Jackson on that and just tell you that Daniel's -- we need to give Coach Brock Bennett a little credit on that. He's his catching coach, they work really, really hard on receiving. It's funny, we got ABS now, but if you talk to a lot of big league clubs which I have and you take to the front offices, they emphasize how important now the receiving is, just to create a good look on the ABS, right, to maybe either get a guy to challenge when he shouldn't or you get the call, right. So Daniel's ability to handle our pitching staff has been something that's been huge. Just like today, multiple times I thought he did a great job just calming guys down and getting 'em back in the zone.

As far as, you know, what else he's done for us, I mean, I thought he had professional at-bats all day today. Taking the ball the other way and, yeah, just getting on base, he didn't steal a bag today or hit a homer, but I thought he had really good at-bats.

Q. Would have been easy, down 6-0, for your team to fold and be done with it, but they didn't. Why did this team not go that way?

WES JOHNSON: Yeah, like I said, we really pride ourself,

I try to tell these guys, every team I had here, and the thing is just I've got some older guys on this team. You can't panic in this game. People are going to put up a good shot at you at times. They're good, Florida's really good. Sully's done -- it's not like I need to tell people -- Sully's done a good job, he's won a lot of ball games. They got a really, really good club. We got a really, really good club though and we can't forget that. And we got to understand that they got to get us out 27 times too. And we're going to be able to, with a bullpen like we have now that's fresh, we're going to be able to mix and match and keep 'em down to where they were. I just kept telling our guys, Hey, just stay in there and grind we're going to be okay. They got to get us out too. And because, like I said earlier, I thought Dylan Vigue threw the ball fine, he just made two mistakes. What do good hitters do when you make mistakes? They hit it hard and it went over the fence. So their guy, somebody for them was eventually going to make a mistake, nobody throws a perfect game. And we just got to be ready and get our swing off and that was our approach and luckily it happened.

Q. You joked about winning a game and not hitting home runs, but seriously though that's a pretty big point when you can do that, and in games at this level, this situation, I would think you would probably need that moving forward.

WES JOHNSON: One of the things that we've got to do is keep that low line drive approach. It's an old cliché, hitting cliché, but at the end of the day we don't get up there and try to hit homers. So what's encouraging today was I saw a lot of, like Ryan Black going back side, Kenny Ishikawa going back side. I thought Tre and Daniel hitting the ball to the right side of the field today. That's how I know we're still in position to hit homers is when we're having that kind of approach. And then when we do get our mistake we just can't miss it, we've got to be able to get off a good swing. So when you see your guys in that kind of position -- Rylan Lujo today, another guy who is going to kind of fall under the rug here on this game, but Rylan had a really good game and had some good at-bats today, got hit by a pitch. Couple infield hits. But that's what he can do, he's a dynamic player with a lot of speed. So when you see your team doing that offensively it's a good comforting sign.

Q. What led to using Caden today in terms of or instead of maybe saving him for tomorrow?

WES JOHNSON: Oh, yeah, I mean, don't get me wrong, we're going to try to win the game tomorrow. But we also have to understand, we have regionals next week. And Caden's done a lot of things for us. He's started. He's closed on Friday nights. He's closed on Saturdays and then turned around and started on Sunday. We need him

available in that role. Yeah, our plan today no matter what was going on was to throw Caden somewhere between 50 and 65 pitches and then he was coming out of the game.

Q. Every team is different in this tournament, but talk about the importance of this tournament playing well in this tournament, how does it prepare you for regionals and moving forward?

WES JOHNSON: You're continuing to play games and see pitches and have at-bats. Don't get me wrong, you can get better doing live at-bats at your place, but, boy you just, the energy's not there, the focus sometimes can get away from you. Because your pitchers are working on some different things maybe. And then you're hitters are trying to do some different things. And you don't have the strike zone, and even though you do, but you kind of don't. So I think the biggest thing about playing this long is we're going to get to play one more day and treat it like a regular week and go back home and then get ready to play again on Friday.

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