

College World Series

Thursday, June 20, 2019

Omaha, Nebraska

Dan McDonnell

Nick Bennett

Danny Oriente

Drew Campbell

Louisville Cardinals

Louisville - 4, Mississippi State - 3

DAN McDONNELL: Obviously want to congratulate Mississippi State. What an awesome year. Great program. We're obviously really close to their leadership, and they fought their tail off. It was a battle.

But I'm real happy for our kids. We showed a lot of fight. We didn't play great, but we hung in there and we fortunately got into their bullpen, and tip your hat to JT, he really -- just didn't get a lot of good swings against him. But our hitters fought, and we managed to score some runs late.

So I'm super proud of these guys to my left as well as the rest of the guys. There was a lot of belief in that dugout. You could hear it in the tone and the comments and the words. They definitely felt like we had a chance. We just had to make it happen, and we were able to there late.

Q. Drew, going into the seventh inning when you knew you were up against it, what was the energy like in the dugout? Where were you guys at at that point?

DREW CAMPBELL: Like Coach said, it was just good energy. Everybody had positive things to say in the dugout, and just going around the dugout everybody was just picking each other up, and we weren't done, they were just pushing.

Q. Drew, can you just walk us through what that walk-off was like and as you kind of veered off into left field and everybody was chasing you, but also people coming from the bullpen to chase you. What was that moment like?

DREW CAMPBELL: After the hit I rounded first. I needed to get a triple still, and once I got around second, just seeing the guys come at me, a lot of these guys are bigger than me. I had to get out of the way and run towards the left field wall.



Q. Danny, your hit there at the plate, kind of your emotions there after scoring the run?

DANNY ORIENTE: Yeah, I mean, I was just trying to move the ball with two strikes, honestly. I wasn't seeing the slider really well all night. The one pretty much right at me was kind of buckling me. So just trying to stay alive in the zone, hit anything that came in the zone, and it worked out.

Q. Nick, how would you grade your performance tonight?

NICK BENNETT: You know, I haven't thrown in a couple weeks in a live game, and I thought there was a lot of positives that I could take away from today. I think Coach Williams called a great game, and I was really just proud of how the guys fought and how we made big plays when we needed to and big hits when we needed to.

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Q. Danny, what is it about this offense that allows you guys to continue to fight like that? Through the first six innings you really hadn't done that offensively?

DANNY ORIENTE: Yeah, I mean, any offense really, but especially ours, it's contagious. As soon as someone gets that first hit, you almost know that the next person is going to get to the next person in the lineup. It may take a few rounds of the lineup to go through to get that to click, but it usually works out.

Q. Drew, Coach has talked about the depth all year and once again, the bottom of the order does it here in this game. Can you just speak to the depth of this team and how you guys at the bottom of the order continued to get big hits?

DREW CAMPBELL: I mean, it's been a fight all year, even in the fall, just to be on this team. To have that type of competition just makes us better. You could tell in the scrimmages at the beginning of the year that we were going to be a good team. Every game was competitive, lifts were competitive, and that's just the

type of team we are. We play fast.

Q. I think it was after the Vanderbilt game, Coach said that having played in some of those close games in the regional in particular and having to grind out some wins and come through the loser's bracket maybe gave you an edge going forward. Do you feel that's the case? Do you feel like that experience is now benefitting you here in Omaha?

NICK BENNETT: Absolutely. I think our team is battle tested, and I think just the tough games that we've played during the season, some really good ACC competition on the weekends. The regional and super regional has helped us a ton. You know, baseball is a lot of mental side of the game, too, so I just think the tough games and battling with one another helps us mentally, as well, and gives us confidence in late-inning games, close games, as well.

Q. Nick, you guys have talked a lot this year about being the best team ever. First team to win two games here in Omaha, does that mean anything to you guys? What's that like?

NICK BENNETT: You know, we're really happy to be the first team to do that, and that's really cool and all, but we're not done with the business yet. There's a lot more baseball to be played, and I think the guys next to me could say the same thing.

But yeah, we're really happy about that, but we're going to forget about this and move on to tomorrow.

Q. The offense came through there late, but after Nick went four innings your bullpen really had to hold things together. Talk about the job the bullpen did, especially pulling a young guy in that situation.

DAN McDONNELL: Yeah, we've been talking about depth with our position players, as well, and the bullpen came through yesterday. We had a five-inning game after Bobby Miller was able to throw four before it started raining. But again, the bullpen was huge today. That Hoeing gives us two in the third, freshman in Garrett Schmeltz, just threw a slider, and Allen is a really good hitter. But then he got the double play ground ball right after that.

You said it, for Poland, it was really good the first half of the year. He's a position player and hurt his hand sliding into second base, so we lost him as a hitter. But he threw a huge inning in the championship game in the regionals on that Monday. That was the eighth, I think, or the ninth, and then Reid.

I give Nick Bennett a lot of credit because Nick pitched Game 1 of the regional, and when we lost Game 2, you realize, okay, we've got to play at least three more

games to win this, and Bobby steps up and Luke Smith steps up, and Nick Bennett demands the ball on Monday in a respectful way, but having pitched on Friday, he wanted that start on Monday. And I think it just kind of sent a message being that he's a captain and he's a leader. Bobby Miller had his cleats on, Reid Detmers had his cleats on, and that Monday to win a regional, and everybody was wanting to help the team.

So I think a lot of the younger pitchers learned from Nick. He's the junior captain draft pick, and he's willing to put it on the line, and that's been fun to watch because these bullpen guys -- we're in a similar situation now that they're all champing at the bit, just like Reid. That's why Reid was really wanting to get back out there and help this team.

Q. I guess since you lost the one game in the regional, there's been a card in the dugout every game that said "Not today." Can you talk about the tone you were hoping to set with that message? And did we just see a good example of that?

DAN McDONNELL: Yeah, it's from a real popular show that all the kids watch. I don't watch it, but it's just a famous line in that show, and we just kind of took that mantra. Actually my good buddy Rock Bellantoni, I read his devotion after we won the super regionals. He's the one who actually sent me a text that morning. He must be a fan of the show. And so I had Mike Allman, our video guy, pull up some video, and I didn't realize how much -- I heard the kids liked it but I didn't realize how much they liked it, and so we just keep using that line, that "Not today." Today is not going to be the last day.

The kids like it, and we've got a hockey jersey in the dugout, we've got a hockey puck. We say we're playing playoff hockey because when you get to Game 7, if you win, you advance to the next round. If you lose, the season is over. This team has kind of acted like this is playoff hockey.

Now, you've got to understand I've got a lot of Midwest/Northern kids that like hockey. So there's probably not a ton of Southern college baseball players that are into hockey, but my team is. So it's just whatever connects with them.

But yeah, it's good to see the belief and the trust and the fight all the way to the end.

Q. Dan, it looked like Drew got a tough read on that ball that got their first run across the board. What was it maybe about his makeup that allowed him to atone for that at the plate, driving in two, including the game winner?

DAN McDONNELL: Yeah, we talk about our toughness

all the time. The kids know I love them immensely, but I'm tough on them, and I challenge them.

I think having played here a few times and all the balls that were falling in front of him, he dove for one and just missed it, he dove for another one, didn't catch it, he dove for one, he caught it. And I'm looking back at the situation, there's a runner on first, I believe, with two outs, and no doubles. And I think he just got caught up with the wind blowing in and he probably crept up a little more than he should have because I just kind of challenged him when he was in the dugout because he is such a good outfielder. He was our center fielder for a period of time. And it's the same thing when he doesn't get the bunt down. We talk a lot about win the at-bat.

I think you can see a lot from our team in those two at-bats, with Oriente and Campbell. Now, I coach the bunting, so I made a comment in the outfield, let's fire the guy who coaches the bunting, but then again, that's me, and it's frustrating because we're pretty good at it, I thought, and we have two at-bats there where we don't get the bunt down, but we talk about it all the time. If you don't get the hit-and-run, you don't get the bunt -- you don't execute and you're still alive, win the at-bat. Show your toughness and win the at-bat. And I think Oriente, that's why I flipped him the shirt, because Oriente won that at-bat, and then he flipped it to Campbell, which is kind of our ritual, help the helper, you've got to give the shirt to somebody else after the prayer.

Those two at-bats by those two guys really showed our toughness tonight.

Q. Dan, a walk-off win in an elimination game is one thing, but having your best friend in the other dugout, what was that like and what was the embrace like after the game for you guys?

DAN McDONNELL: Yeah, it's hard. It'll be hard to talk about it so I'm going to try not to. I don't ever prepare for the season to end. You don't ever mentally go there. It's hard to. So when the season ends, I have nothing prepared for what I'm going to say in the outfield, and I have nothing prepared for this press conference. But it dawned upon me that if we lost today, I would have lost to one of my best friends.

I've been saying all season, people have been asking about Mike Martin, and I've done some radio bits and a lot of questions about him, and I've honestly told everybody if you had to lose a game, and I've lost my share, you'd want to lose to Mike Martin because of how gracious he is, how complimentary he is, how genuine he is. And you have so much respect for him. And don't get me wrong, everybody knows me, I hate losing. I mean, I'm serious, like to a fault. I'm super

competitive.

But it dawned on me this morning, well, Mike Martin is retired since he left last night, and I thought, okay, I'm not going to coach against him anymore, so who would I accept losing to more than any other coach in the country, and I thought, well, isn't this ironic, I'm playing against Chris Lemonis tonight. So it just kind of gave me a soft spot to go, if it happens tonight, be thankful it's to your best friend and he still gets to play. Obviously if it doesn't, I'm super excited for our kids, our fans. We've worked hard for this.

You asked the question about -- and I thought Nick Bennett answered it great. They talk all the time about being the best team that's ever played here. That's a challenge these kids have, and they know, they know what the records have been in the past, and they know no team has never won two. We don't talk about it. It's not a goal. We never say let's get to Omaha and win two games. But they answered the question. I think they know they just accomplished something no other Louisville team has ever accomplished.

But they still want more. And so I'm super excited and happy for our kids. But you've got to hug your best friend, and you realize his season is over. We've all been there, and it's happening -- it's already happened to four teams in the past 48 hours or so, and it's just -- it is what it is this time of the year.

But I did tell him again, this is the place -- if we have to do it, we have to do it in Omaha. We sure hope we don't ever have to do it in an earlier round.

Q. I'm guessing Luke will be the guy tomorrow on the mound. Do you see it as an advantage that he's pitched against Vandy, or do you see it kind of even out since Vandy has seen him?

DAN McDONNELL: Not so much an advantage. I just thought Luke pitched a big game in the regionals. That was huge. Once we've gotten into the loser's bracket, you're going to need more than three starters. Everything happens for a reason, and Luke pitching that great game in the regionals gives him and gives our team the confidence to let's go out there and compete, and we get to play another great team tomorrow night. You know, as a coach you always think you could play a little bit better. We can run the bases a little better, we can execute a little better, and let's see what happens.

So I'm super glad that I don't have to give the end-of-the-season talk and really fired up for our kids, our fan base, and for those Louisville folks that believed in us and made the trip out and hopefully many more will be making the trip out tomorrow.