

Atlantic Coast Conference Baseball Championship

Sunday May 29, 2016



Monte Lee
Alex Bostic
Mike Triller
Chris Okey
Clemson

Clemson - 18, Florida State - 13

MONTE LEE: A long day, a long day for everybody involved, but just want to give -- I want to give Florida State a lot of credit, first and foremost, to be down by that many runs early in a ballgame and to plug away and keep competing the way that they did; and to essentially, there right at the end, they made it a ballgame, and it just shows you a lot about Mike Martin, his coaching staff and his players, how tough they are, how good of a competitive ballclub they are to stay in that ballgame.

But look at our guys. What an unbelievable job. We scored a bunch of runs early in the ballgame. That momentum started there in the first inning. Okey hit the -- crushed a ball, and next thing you know, it was like putting gasoline on a fire in our dugout. Our guys were fired up and ready to go, and we competed about as good as we could.

Brooks gave us everything that he had. He's been a guy that as a true freshman is going to be really good for us. Been a reliever for us. We asked him to start in the biggest game of the year for us and he did a good job. Bostic did an unbelievable job. Great to see Alex Bostic who has been up-and-down for us this year have the kind of outing that he had for us today. And Pat Krall found a way to do what Pat Krall does.

So just overall, just so proud of my players, how we competed. This is a selfless group of men that show up every single day and compete pitch-by-pitch, inning-by-inning, game-by-game, and I couldn't be prouder of them. So just really proud of my guys.

Q. Three different delays, that's not ideal for a baseball game. What did you do to stay loose and kind of stay relaxed in those breaks?

CHRIS OKEY: We just made fun of Mike, mostly (Laughter.) I'm just I had canning. We played some

games, stayed loose. We stayed focused on the game. We knew that we had about three outs left at the end to go out there and win an ACC title. We stayed focused, stayed loose in there, played some games. But we all knew the task at hand, and proud to be ACC champions.

MIKE TRILLER: Just like Okey said, stayed loose, stayed relaxed. Made fun of each other, played games. Had a good time in there. Just to get our mind right to head back out.

ALEX BOSTIC: Basically that's it. We just kind of stayed relaxed. Knew what we had to do to take care of it and stayed relaxed and went on the field and took care of it.

Q. Coming from where this team was a month or two ago, to being ACC champs, what has that journey been like for you and these guys?

CHRIS OKEY: I'd even take it back further than a month or two ago. I'd probably start in the fall, when they came out with predictions, and us finishing eighth in our division. I think that's when we started -- we all took that to heart and remembered it, and every single day, every single series we played, we had a chip on our shoulder.

And look at us today. That proves the beginning-of-the-year predictions don't mean anything. What matters is the guys we play with and we played with heart. We're never out of it. I'll go to war with these guys any day of the week.

I'm so blessed to be a Clemson Tiger, stand next to these guys right here, and I'm excited about the few weeks to come.

Q. I know you made the podium with your big performance early in the weekend, but how weird is everything? Do you feel like this might be a dream? You get Most Outstanding Player; that's pretty farfetched, just a few days ago, wouldn't you say?

MIKE TRILLER: Yeah, I'm just happy Coach was able to give me an opportunity to get out there, and I'm just happy to be able to contribute with these guys who have been working so hard all year; just not playing, for most of the year, just watching these guys and

encouraging them. I'm just happy that I'm able to come out and help them out.

Q. Obviously you and Mike, both veterans on this team, have been on this team for awhile. What is it like for you as his teammates to see the kind of tournament that he's had an get the MVP today?

CHRIS OKEY: I couldn't ask for a better teammate, a better person to be on our team. The way he day in and day out, like he said, wasn't getting much playing time at the beginning of the year, but he never took it to heart. He came in the weight room and worked hard every single day. He came in and worked hard every single day at practice, and it shows. When you get an opportunity, guys like him step up and I couldn't be happier for him, about the tournament he had and what he did for this team. And for an incredible dude, an incredible teammate, I am so excited for Mike Triller.

Q. Can you talk about coming in there and shutting things down, and for you, what that meant? I know it's been a rocky road the last few months for you. Can you talk about how that's going to help you going forward in post-season?

ALEX BOSTIC: Like Coach Lee said, I had struggled the last month pitching-wise, being consistent and all that. I just tried to go out there and make things as simple as possible, work ahead of batters, throw strikes and get quick outs.

So I think that's a big confidence boost for me, knowing that I can go out there and do that and help my team, it's big for me.

Q. Have you been in a situation, maybe at Charleston, where even a week and a half before the league tournament, you weren't even certain you were going to be able to qualify for this, and suddenly you're champions. This has to be most meteoric rise in such a short period of time as you've experienced.

MONTE LEE: Well, it all starts, it starts with toughness, it starts with confidence and it starts with believing in each other.

And that's one thing that I've done since I got the job and met these guys for the very first time is try to instill a level of confidence and belief and toughness in them; that they can go out there and compete with anybody. You're going to have ups and downs in the game of baseball. That's the bottom line.

But it's my job as the head coach to make sure that even through tough times and when we're going through bad stretches that I pick our guys up; that I keep them upbeat and positive, and make sure that they understand that you've got to have big body

language, positive body language.

You've got to be confident even when you get beat by 15 runs or more, which has happened a few times this year, and guess what happens the next day when we come out. We won those ballgames.

People can question our ballclub, all they want, when we've had bad losses. But these guys stuck together and showed up every single day with a common belief that they can go out there and compete with anybody.

I couldn't be prouder of these guys. It's a selfless group of players. One of the things we preach is to be selfless, show up every day and do your job and help your team win, and they have bought into that. We're sitting here with 42 wins. We're the ACC Champions and we're going to be playing at home, hopefully for the next few weeks.

Q. For Coach and Chris as a team leader, with so many hours of rain delay, how do you keep everybody focused; started at 11:00 and you started again at 7:00. How do you keep everybody dialed in?

MONTE LEE: Well, I'll answer that, and maybe I'll answer it a little bit and give Chris Okey some credit.

Chris Okey is the leader of our ballclub. Has been since day one. When we gave up the eight-spot in the eighth inning and came in for that last delay, the guys were in the locker room and I kind of stuck my head in there, I was running around and trying to figure out what the weather was going to do. And I walk in, and Okey has the guys, made them take all their cell phones away and made them participate in a team activity to loosen them up, okay.

And I didn't need to do anything. We preached to our guys, I've preached to this team, that if we want to achieve great things, the leaders on this team have to police themselves, and that's a big part of leadership is you've got to police the ballclub, and Chris Okey did that. And when the team came back out, they were laughing and they were loose and they were ready to go and they were confident.

That's a testament to him. This is a guy that we all know here in a few weeks is going to be a pretty good draft pick, and he shows up every single day, whether he's swinging the bat well, not swinging the bat well, he catches every single pitch of every single inning for us for the most part. I've asked him if he wants time off. He says no, I'm ready to go, I want to play, I want to catch.

He's a tremendous leader. He's a guy that's going to be successful for a long, long time in whatever it is that

he chooses to do because of his leadership.

It's guys like Mike Triller, guys like Alex Bostic; these two guys on my left probably haven't gotten the opportunities that they would have liked to have had, and part of that is my fault. I haven't put them in there probably as much as I should have.

But when we needed them the most in the ACC Championship game, Alex Bostic stepped up and pitched like a real guy against a really good lineup. And Mike Triller is a fifth-year senior, hasn't gotten many opportunities, and we put him in the lineup. He winds up being the MVP of the tournament.

So there's some great story lines, but just shows you the common belief in this group of guys and what they have been through together that they have policed themselves, and they have led this team. So I'm just happy and proud of them. It's a testament to what these guys have done. It's just an awesome feeling for me as a head coach.

Q. You mentioned playing at home the next few weeks. Do you feel like without question, this team deserves one of those eight national seeds, and would you be shocked if you don't see Clemson as one of those top national seeds come Monday?

MONTE LEE: Well, we were the No. 6 RPI team in the country going into today, and we won the ACC Championship.

Three of the four teams that we beat today will host regionals. Two of them, at least one of them, is going to be a national seed. And the other two were definitely in the conversation about being a national seed.

So sitting here at 42 wins, having won the ACC championship, that No. 6 going into the game, I don't know where we're at now. I think we absolutely deserve to be a national seed because I think our resumé is one of the best eight resúmes in the country.

So I think with the committee, when they look at all the resúmes and they set them all out there, Clemson has to be one of the top eight, if you look at our Top-50 wins, our Top-100 wins, I think it may be second-best in the country, tops in the country, I don't know. That's what Brian, our SID, I'm sure, knows it. And he does an unbelievable job for us.

But I think we deserve it, absolutely.

Q. The last coach here won an ACC Championship in his first season. You were able to do that. What are the challenges of stepping into a situation like

this and being so successful so quickly?

MONTE LEE: Well, I mean, any time you're replacing a Hall of Famer like Jack Leggett, the one thing that Coach Leggett did was he instilled work ethic, toughness and character in the ballplayers that are here.

So the transition for me going into this year has been an easy one because of the great job that he did in instilling all those characteristics in the players. But for me, I'm going to be me. And I'm going to be myself. I'm not trying to be somebody that I'm not.

So I don't really look at it that way. I just know that the group of players, a lot of times, when coaches come in for their first year, they talk about: We've got to get our own guys in here, some of these guys don't fit what I'm looking for.

I try to do the opposite. I try to embrace these guys. That's been our message since day one. I'm the head coach here and you're my players. I'm going to embrace you and do everything I can do to serve to you make the best players I can make you and hope you have a great experience, and that's what I've tried to do. I tried to make sure that our guys show up every day and enjoy coming to the park. If a group of players enjoy coming to the ballpark every day, they tend to over-achieve for you, so that's always been my model.

I've just tried to be myself. I'm very comfortable with what I do. I make a lot of mistakes but I do them aggressively, and I'm not afraid to make mistakes. I'll try different things with the team to see if it will work and sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't, but I all have the right intent, which is to put my players first and try to get the most out of them.

But these guys have bought in. They accomplished this. It's nothing that I did. I just tried to cheer them up, keep them going, show them how to compete every day and got great leadership and it's just a testament to what they did.

Q. In terms of pushing buttons, is this about as good a weekend as you've had -- and secondly, is anyone at liberty to divulge the team activity that was so loosening during the last of the delays?

MONTE LEE: Well, I'll let Okey answer the team activity part. The locker room is the players. I don't go in the locker room too much. That's their sanctuary.

But for me, you know what, I think when it comes to pushing buttons, the bottom line is the players have to execute. They have to execute. You can push all the buttons you want, and if it doesn't work, it doesn't work. It's on me.

So it's what they did. All I did was I gave Mike Triller an opportunity and he absolutely made the most of it. Gave Bostic the ball today when we needed him, and he absolutely made the most of it.

Chris Okey is one of the toughest players in the country. He's one of the best catchers in the country. I think he's the best catcher in the country; and you look at the ACC, there's a whole bunch of good ones, but shows up every day and competes and helps us win games.

To me, it's not about necessarily pushing the right buttons. It's about the guys have to execute when you give them the opportunity and the players did that.

Q. Team activity?

CHRIS OKEY: It's a game called the Mafia. It's kind of hard to explain. Gets everyone involved. Everyone has their own little role and it gives everyone a chance to kind of laugh and make fun of each other and get mad at each other at the same time. It worked. (Laughter.)

Q. How much deliberation went into taking Bostic out going into the eighth? Was that a tough call for you?

MONTE LEE: It was a very tough call. It was a tough call he was having an unbelievable outing, but he was also at like 65 pitches and he's been a reliever.

The last thing that I want to do with a guy like Alex Bostic with the way he's throwing the baseball, I don't want to jeopardize his health. And for his pitch count to get that high out of the bullpen, you're starting to flirt with, okay, if I send him back out there and he winds up throwing 80, 85 pitches, he's going through something that we haven't done with him before.

So it was kind of a -- it was more of, we're starting to get into that, where we could hurt him, and I didn't want to do that. Had I wished that maybe Iran him back out there for one more anything; maybe. But if I ran him back out there for one more inning and winds up getting hurt, I'm going to be kicking myself for doing that.

It was really more of a health situation for me and Coach c for making that decision. I didn't want to take him out of the game because he was throwing so well but on the other side I didn't want to put him in jeopardy of hurting himself.

Q. You took three games from legendary Coach Mike Martin, probably your biggest rival in the ACC. Does that make it a little more special that you're able to go through them to win the ACC?

MONTE LEE: Mike Martin, when you look at the definition of a coach, it's somebody that gets the most out of his players, and you know, it's funny, as coaches, we all talk about each other and what everybody does, and the success that others have and what they do.

The one thing that constantly comes up about Mike Martin is how good a job he does at maximizing his talent. That's what they do. They are the model of offensive approach, and I'm an offensive guy. So you know, we want to model kind of what we do from an offensive approach standpoint after a guy like a Mike Martin and what they do with their team.

So I have an unbelievable amount of respect for a man that's won close to 2,000 games and finds a way to be in the top 20 pretty much year-in and year-out. I've got a lot of respect for him.

To me, I mean, and heck, who knows, who knows what's going to happen in the future. I'm sure they'll whip us from time to time, as well. It's bound to happen. Today we got the upper hand, we found a way to beat them, and just got a lot of respect for them and wish nothing but the best for then moving forward.

Q. You go into the clubhouse thereafter that last rain delay, what made you say, okay, guys, put the phone away; what did you see that caused you to say let's do something as a team?

CHRIS OKEY: It actually wasn't even me. It was Coach LeCroy. I was actually watching the game on TV. I went to go throw some trash away, and he gave me the idea of, hey, go around and take everyone's phones. And I looked around and sure enough, everyone is on their phone. I said, "I'll do it, see what happens."

Unfortunately I've probably been in that group but I left my phone on the bus. So yeah, I took their phones out and then they got all pissed off a little bit. I said, "let's play a game, help us smile a little more." Got them out there, got them loose and we just won the ACC Championship, so let's do it.