

2026 HATTIESBURG REGIONAL
Postgame Press Conference
(3) Jacksonville State 15, (2) Virginia 7

Chris Pollard – Virginia Head Coach (Opening Statement)

“Yeah, first off, congratulations to Jacksonville State. I thought they played very well. I think they're a really talented team. I think they're exceptionally well coached. I thought that jumped off the computer to me when I watched them in preparation this week. Coach Bieser and his staff have done a great job. They're deep, they executed well tonight, and I think anybody that watched the game in person or if you're watching on TV, like they just look more ready to play than we did, and that's disappointing. And I accept that. I own that. Secondly, gutted for Eric Becker, he has worked so hard to overcome multiple injuries this year, was so proud to be back for this team down the stretch, and I'm just disappointed for him. We don't know what tomorrow will bring in terms of how he's feeling, and I don't have a full assessment of the injury. Obviously, it goes back to the hit by pitch in the first inning. I did think that RJ Holmes stepped in and played really well when his number got called, gave us really good at-bats. I thought, if I'm honest, that we look sped up in different phases of the game over the portion of the game that I was there to see. We didn't handle the bunt well in the third inning. We spent four days prepping for that. We knew Jacksonville State was going to bunt a lot. We spent a great deal of time in our practice yesterday prepping for it. We talked about it. We knew they loved to use the safety. We knew they sacrificed. They've got 120 something bunt in play on the season, so it's not a surprise at all. And we just didn't make two plays that we should make. We made four bad base running reads that were uncharacteristic. There were three plays that we didn't make. We also had several situations where in RBI situations we didn't execute with two strikes, right? Like we had at least off the top of my head three 0-2 hits that we gave up with runners in scoring position, and like none of that's winning baseball, and I'm disappointed and frustrated. I know these guys are too. The reality is like we got to fix that in the off season. We don't have time to worry about that right now. We've got to be great at getting back, getting hydrated, getting rested, and then waking up tomorrow morning with amnesia, and getting off the mat. You know, I had time to sit and think while the rest of the game was going on, and one thing that jumped out to me was we had a team in 2018 that got shut out in the opening game of a regional in Athens, found itself down 8-1 in Game 2 the next day, battled back and won that game over the last three innings, and went on to dominate the rest of that regional, including beating UGA on their home field two times on the last day to win the regional. So, like, we got a lot of baseball ahead of us if we choose to play well, and we've got to be good at flushing this out of our system, and getting off the mat and be ready to have our best possible fight when we come out tomorrow. We got a great competitor on the mound in Kyle Johnson, and I know he will give everything he has, and we got to get back in the fight tomorrow.”

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Q: There was a lot of talk about some of the mid-majors and how they were seeded. Did you think Jacksonville State, I mean, you watch them a lot. Do you think they should have been a three seed or do you think maybe they were under seeded?

Coach Pollard: They got 44 wins, they're a top 25 RPI team in the country. That league was really, really good this year. We played a Liberty team twice during the regular season that finished behind them in the regular season. You look at their personnel, they certainly deserve consideration for a two seed. And they certainly came out tonight and showed that they deserve to be in this event. And so whether there are two or three, they outplayed us tonight, that's for sure.

Q: Joe. You're going to be facing a Southern Miss team that's in the same situation you guys are. What will be the key to putting this behind you and being ready tomorrow? And also, were there any situations earlier this season you can draw on similar?

Joe Tirolly: Yeah, I just want to say praise Jesus for this opportunity and just all glory to him for this day, us as a team, we're so grateful to be here and so grateful to have this opportunity. I think just going out tomorrow and just like coach said, we play with amnesia, just flushing it and just giving everything that we got on the field tomorrow, being the very best competitive versions of ourselves. You kind of put me on the spot with kind of drawing some inspiration. I'd say maybe the Clemson series. We had, I think won the first game, then we lost the second game and the third game was really big for us. So we came out and we competed, we battled really hard in a tough game. So I think again, just coming out tomorrow and playing as the very best competitive versions of ourselves and I think we'll find ourselves in a good spot.

Q: I felt like Brian's for them was able to keep you off the board for those innings, let their offense get going. Preparing for a guy like that where it's similar to Zach Kowski, but it's 95 to 97. What sort of goes into that and sort of what did he do well today to kind of keep you guys off balance?

Coach Pollard: Yeah, I mean, the plan was to wait him out. He's got, if you go and look at the wild pitches, the hit by pitches and the walks, he's got more than a free pass per inning. And so the idea was to try to ground him out and force the pitch count out. And we took more pitches than we typically do. I felt like he was in the zone just enough. He was probably a 52, 55% strike thrower over the course of that game. But it's hard to square up, right? You look at the

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numbers, nobody's hit him hard. He gives up very few extra base hits. He gives up a lot of ground ball contact. It's a really unique angle. And the dude's hard to hit, and his stuff is really good.

Q: Coach, how much did that upset in game one, did it change the strategy for you guys at all? Knowing like, if you win, you're going to go get a four seed and maybe have a really good chance to cruise into the regional final?

Well, I hope we weren't thinking about that tonight. It certainly wasn't on my mind. Tonight, we're focused on a really good Jacksonville State team. You know, and now we're at a point, we talk a lot in our program about one game seasons, right? Like we want to wake up tomorrow and treat it like a one game season. We try to do that throughout the course of the year. So this shouldn't feel unfamiliar to us tomorrow. The reality is we've got a one game season tomorrow. We've got to focus in on the task at hand and try to wake up 0-0, trying to be 1-0 at the end of the day and give ourselves another chance together the next day.

Q: Chris, you guys had 12 hits, scored seven runs. Do you feel like that ought to be enough in a game like this?

Coach Pollard: Yeah, you would think so, right, Jeff? Right, you score seven runs in the first game of a regional with your number one on the mound. You would like to think that's enough. But you do some of the things that we did tonight, like not handling the bunt. We walked a guy with two outs in the second and that bit us. We gave up some 0-2 hits on unexecuted pitches that we left in the heart of the zone with runners in scoring positions. You do those things and that's why seven runs wasn't enough tonight.

Q: You kind of mentioned your side of execution, but on the flip side, when you're scouting Jacksonville State, what does that lineup do so well, and what did they do so well tonight?

Coach Pollard: Well, they get on the line really well, and so they can put a lot of pressure on you. They had what, three infield hits off the top of my head? I missed part of the game, so you'll have to fill me in if they had some that I didn't see. They're a really, really good bunting team. They've got over 100 stolen bases. I think they use their athleticism really well. And they don't swing and miss a lot, right? I mean, part of it, we missed some spots in two strike

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situations. Credit them too, because they did a good job of moving the baseball with two strikes. And that's a good job with their two-strike approach and execution.

Q: You might have just answered this, but were you able to watch the game after you left and what led to your ejection?

Coach Pollard: Yeah, I did watch it on the computer. I'm super confused about the ejection, Jeff. So we ran an inside move to second base, right? It was a possible steal, possible bunt situation. So we ran an inside move there, just like we had done multiple times early in the game, just like we've done probably in the neighborhood of 75 to 100 times over the course of this season. The exact same play that we had run earlier in the game, at least two other times. The umpire at third called time, called it an illegal pick and said it was a violation. I started walking out to get clarification and he said I couldn't come out. Of course I can come out and ask what he saw and why he made that call, particularly since we'd run the same play earlier in the game without that being called against us. As I walked out, I said, "Hey, we haven't had that called against us all year," Right? I think what he was trying to call there was that it wasn't a real attempt at a pick. So after I said, "Hey, we haven't had that called against us all year." He said, "Your guy shuffled towards second base." Jeff, we teach our guys to shuffle to second base. And the reason we teach them to shuffle to second base in an inside move is because if you start the inside move, right, you separate your hands and you start to make the throw to second, and that runner's going first movement and he's running to third, you're not in a position to make the play at third. So we teach our guys when you cross over the rubber, reset your feet into a shuffle, and that way if that guy breaks first movement for third base, you're able to pause and execute the throw to third. So after he said, well, he shuffled towards second base like it wasn't a real pick. I said, we haven't had that called against us all year. He started to turn and walk back to his position. I started to turn. I said, "That's terrible." Next thing I know, I was thrown out of the ballgame. It seems completely unreasonable to me. I'm flabbergasted. Is that really what the NCAA wants to do in that situation? We ran a legal play that hadn't been called against us all year. We have literally run that play close to 100 times without that call being made. I went out there for clarification. There was zero confrontation. There was zero profanity. There was zero effort to show him up. And I simply made the point that nobody else has made that call against us. And I found myself thrown out of an NCAA regional game. It's absurd. Absurd.