

**2019 Mississippi State Baseball
Postgame Quotes
Mississippi State vs. Alabama
April 12, 2019**

Head Coach Chris Lemonis

Q: What were you seeing out of Ethan Small tonight?

CL: Just fastball location, all [game] long. It seemed like he could throw it pretty much where he wanted and just had good life to the fastball.

Q: What happened from the second inning, where you were hitting the ball well, to later in this one?

CL: We were a lot better when we got a leadoff guy on. Those first couple innings, we would get some baserunners and [Sam Finnerty] wasn't as good with runners on base I thought, but he settled in a little bit. He's had a lot of success this year. Usually on Friday nights, we've had a couple times where we'll get to somebody and then that guy settles in and that's why they're Friday night guys in this league. So, I think you tip your hat to their guy.

Q: How do you feel about the crowd of 10,000, even with the threat of rain tonight?

CL: It was awesome. A very good night, and we got it in just in time. We debated on going from 6:30 to 6:00. So, that was a pretty good call there at least. Let's hope we keep it going the rest of the weekend.

Q: The high fastball has been a big pitch for Ethan Small all year long, why do you think that pitch works for him?

CL: Well, it's deceptive. So, hitters think it's a little lower in the zone. I'm sure when you go into a weekend, everybody says, 'Don't swing here,' and there's just a deceptive piece to Ethan and he really knows how to pitch off of it. He'll go down [in the strike zone] and then come up. Then, there is his timing piece too – he did a great job of messing up some timing earlier in the game.

Q: Was there a predetermined limit to how much Small would play tonight?

CL: It was just pitch count. He went a little high last week and we like to stay between 85 and 100 [pitches], if we can. Next week, we have a short week, too. So, you're managing a lot of different things. It was nice to get the two runs and separate it a little bit more but, [Jared Liebelt] has been so good too. We have confidence in our bullpen guys.

Q: Is it safe to say that Justin Foscue to second base is a permanent move?

CL: Right now, it is. He has played that position really well and it's making us a better team. I was probably the guy who fought it because I just liked him at 3rd [base] – he was playing well. We put him over [at second] and he's played with a lot of range and made some really good slow-roller plays.

Q: What's it like knowing you have a guy who can basically strike out the side, whenever he wants?

CL: In our world, we're hoping they'd hit a couple fly ball outs or something like that because we want him to pitch longer. You realize it's just pitch after pitch but, it's just dominant. When he strikes out the side with the bases loaded, that's when you realize 'This guy's special.' He's been special all year, but he can reel it in when he wants to.

Q: Do you work on making Ethan more efficient? Trying to pitch more to contact or do you just leave him where he is?

CL: When I took the job, you look at the stats and you see he was averaging about four innings a start last year and that's what we thought. We were going to help him out. The reality is that he just doesn't give up a lot of contact. There's really not a whole lot you can do to it and he's pretty efficient. He wastes some pitches here and there, but no more than a regular guy. There's just not a lot of contact.

Ethan Small

Q: Some good stuff for you tonight. What was working for you out there to put up 15 Ks?

ES: Really it was just locating the fastball, I would be willing to say it was probably about 90 percent fastballs. The off-speed was throwing them off a little bit but moving it in and out and going up when I needed to.

Q: It looked like they were willing to chase that fastball up in the zone. Is that something you picked up on pretty early?

ES: Yeah. Pretty much every week I try to see if that's something they'll swing at and if it works well I keep going with it.

Q: Alabama loaded the bases on you in that one inning, nobody out, and Coach Foxhall comes out. What was that conversation like there? What changed that inning?

ES: I knew what was going on with me mechanically. It was the long break, we had the video review, and we came back out and I was getting long with my arm. I kind of shortened it back up. Pretty much, we talked about what pitch I was going to throw at that point.

Q: There was a moment that Dustin (Skelton) came out to speak to you. It looked like you were a little bit frustrated, and needed to cool down, like you needed a called strike there?

ES: When he came out, he pretty much let me do the talking. He didn't really say much, he was just kind of like, 'Just pour into me.' So, I told him I'll get him, just give me some time, my arm slot's a little messed up, I'll find it.

Q: Seven straight strikeouts, what was working for you during that stretch?

ES: I really had good command of my fastball tonight. And, of course, there were some stretches where I kind of lost it with the breaks. But it was staying away early, coming in late, and then going up.

Q: What is it about their order that you keep them from hitting any fly balls?

ES: I think just keeping it low in the zone. We got some fouled straight back, and as a pitcher [you] don't want that. At that point just keeping it low in the zone and elevating it really is more of a two-strike look, seeing if they'll go for it.

Q: What does it mean to have this kind of performance on Super Bulldog Weekend?

ES: Pretty surreal. It hasn't really sunk in yet that that's what happened. Really special though. This weekend's meant a lot to us for a long time and we appreciate the support for sure.

Q: Jared Liebelt's been a guy that's been the go-to guy in SEC play. What's it like to have confidence turning the ball over to him in ball games?

ES: With [Liebelt], you know what you're getting. You're going to get 92-93 with a lot of sink and you're going to get a lot of quick outs and I think he came in and did his job and did it really well.

Jordan Westburg

Q: What's it like being behind a pitching performance like that?

JW: Unreal. You can just sit back and watch him (Ethan Small) work. We didn't get much action because he was taking care of business. It was pretty surreal watching him pitch.

Q: What did you hit out?

JW: Fastball, outer-third. I've been chasing a little bit of the breaking stuff they've been throwing me and getting away from my approach and I just found a good fastball to put a good swing on.

Q: They had the review. What's it like being out there and them sorting through all that?

JW: It's kind of nerve-wracking, especially when you're about to walk up to the plate and they take three or four minutes and you don't know what to do with yourself. You're so locked in, you kind of have to zone out for a little bit and then get re-locked in. It's kind of a weird deal but it helps the game.

Q: Alabama's pitcher after he gave up a four-spot was able to settle down and mow through, but obviously you stayed with it and got to the bullpen?

JW: He did a good job of mixing his stuff up and he was getting us out. We had some hard hit balls and they weren't falling but we went on a little run there and so we got him finally.

Q: Did the offense feel good early on? Even the first inning, some balls were smacked hard. Did you all think you'd get to him?

JW: Yeah, no doubt. I think there's never a rush in our offense. There's never pressure. We have so many weapons up and down the lineup. Our nine-hole guy has a couple of hits, Brad [Cumbe], our DH, has a couple hits tonight. Guys are always coming up in situations and doing their job. So, there's never a feel of worry in our lineup.

Q: So, when you go through that first time through the order, and you mention the loud outs, what's the conversation like in the dugout? Is it one of those things where you think it's a matter of time?

JW: It's just one of those things where you keep swinging it. You're seeing the ball well, you're putting good swings on it, they're going to fall eventually. And you get some loud outs and you get some cheap hits. Jake [Mangum] hit one five feet in front of home plate and gets an infield single out of it after he smokes a couple, so that's just how baseball works.