

**2019 Mississippi State Baseball
Postgame Quotes
Mississippi State vs. Youngstown State
Friday, February 16, 2019**

Head Coach Chris Lemonis

Q: What did you think of the job Ethan [Small] did?

CL: I thought he was really good, especially early. I think he was a little excited early, so he ran out of gas a little bit. [He] really commanded the fastball. He has a little of an inviso-fastball, where he throws it by hitters. He was really good. If he would've kept striking people out, we would have had a really good chance to win.

Q: Was the decision to pull him because of pitch count?

CL: Pitch count, just pitch count.

Q: Did the eighth inning feel like justice, a little bit?

CL: A little bit. It was one of those days where we just kept shaking our heads like, 'alright, it's going to happen. One's going to fall.' We needed that one big one from Tanner [Allen]. I thought that was the play of the game.

Q: What did you think of the atmosphere tonight?

CL: It was pretty good, huh? I told our guys that we are going to take it in while we take the national anthem because it was just really cool to stand out there and to have just the whole day-- going to the pregame ceremony, meeting the former players. It's just been a cool day all the way around, but the atmosphere was awesome.

Q: What did you see from Jordan [Westburg] tonight?

CL: Good contact all day long. He's really athletic. He puts pressure on you. He can hurt you in so many ways.

Q: What did Landon [Jordan] do to earn the opening-day spot at designated hitter?

CL: He led the team in hitting in the fall, and maybe in spring training. I probably should have hit him higher in the lineup, but being a freshman, I held him down there. I think he hit .471 in the fall, and [he] had a really good spring. He was one of our top four hitters in the spring, so he's been a pure hitter. He's going to be a really good college player.

Q: Will you experiment in the DH spot?

CL: A little bit, yes. I definitely will. We have some different guys, about three or four guys, that can really jump in there and give us some help. It's a lot of matchups, just dependent on what's going on.

Q: What is your assessment of the bullpen tonight?

CL: Really good. Peyton [Plumlee] came in and got his curveball going in the second inning he was in there. That helped him out a little bit. I thought Cole [Gordon] was really good. I thought that inning that [Gordon] came out and pitched, we were going to run him back out there, but the game got expanded with the 18 innings tomorrow, I thought was huge. I thought that, maybe the best hitting of the day, was Colby [White]. [White] is mid-90s, and I don't know if the radar gun had it right, but it's really good. You talk about a kid that has gotten a lot better, he has gotten a lot better.

Q: What did you like about the way you guys put the bat on the ball tonight?

CL: That's really good. Their guy was a little softer, but their starter was really good. He kind of knew what he was doing, so it just made you put a lot of balls in play. We pulled everyone up, about the fifth, we were a little too aggressive. We almost needed to take a few more pitches. A lot of them were first-pitch outs, and we were hitting a line drive right at somebody, so you really can't say too much.

Q: Are you excited to get all this behind you so you can focus on baseball?

CL: Oh, yes. It's been a lot, just getting the stadium going, opening day, my first game and the kids' first game. A lot of mental things, and the kids did a great job of fighting through that. It's been great. Our administration and staff do such a great job to make it easy for you, but it is. I told somebody today, I'm just ready to coach. I want to get out there, play the game and coach."

Q: Will your plans stay the same for tomorrow?

CL: JT [Ginn] will be the first game, and Keegan [James] will be the second.

Q: How do you think that Peyton [Plumlee] handled the magnitude of the moment?

CL: I thought it was pretty good. They got on a couple of his sliders. We haven't hit a slider all spring training, so I was a little surprised. It's just getting out there, getting your feet wet. That's for a lot of our guys right now, and that's white we ran [White] out late, just to let him get out there, and let him pitch in that atmosphere. He will be available and ready to go tomorrow. That's for a lot of our guys because we have some guys with some really good stuff.

Q: How will you split up catching responsibilities tomorrow? Will Hayden [Jones] maybe get his first turn?

CL: I think so. [Jones] has a chance. That's why I gave him an at-bat tonight, just to get him out there and let him see it. I told Dustin [Skelton] to get in here and get in the ice tub. [Skelton], most likely, he will come in and catch the first game. Probably, [Jones] will catch that second one, somewhere in there. [Skelton] may catch the end of that second game. When you're out there, in the closing minutes, you'd like the older guy to be out there. [Jones] is really good. He's a talented kid. He's going to have a great career.

Ethan Small

Q: How were you feeling out on the mound?

ES: I felt really good. Pitching in front of that crowd was amazing. It was everything we had dreamed about. I know these guys are happy that we're finally getting to play in the new ballpark. [It was] really special and felt really good today.

Q: How were you attacking these guys, especially at the beginning of the game?

ES: Early on it was just beating them with the fast ball. Pretty much staying away for the most part, going in late, and then as the game wears on throwing a lot more changeups and mixing in that with them.

Q: What did you notice about the offense in the last inning?

ES: If there is anything I know about our offense is that it's going to come around eventually. As a starting pitcher, there was never a moment where I doubted them. They're slapping balls over the field right at people and that's baseball, as everybody says. Seeing them come back and score 14 runs, it was just like, 'well, I knew it was coming.' For me, it was just staying on my process and taking in what's coming.

Q: Has there been more of an emphasis on getting more strikeouts than walks this year?

ES: Absolutely. Fox has been working on us. Basically, it's like 'attack the zone and if they hit it, they hit it.' That's the big thing with punching guys out because the guys have really good stuff. Colby White, there was no way that was 91 mph. He was throwing the heck out of the ball. It's just been like that. Throw fast balls for strikes aggressively and at the bottom zone and let the rest take care of itself.

Q- You set a career-high today on strikeouts. How special was that to you?

ES: I didn't even know it, honestly, until my mom said, 'Ethan, hey, you did that.' It's awesome. Hopefully just keep building on it and stuff gets better for next week for the Southern Miss series.

Tanner Allen

Q: What was it like to hit the first homerun and get the offense back into the game?

TA: It was a moment I'll never forget, hitting a home run on Opening Day at Dudy Noble, especially the "New Dude." The first couple of hits, it felt like every ball we hit hard, [but it] went right to somebody. Finally, we got a ball in the open swing zone, [I] put a good swing at it and tied the ball game.

Q: Was there a moment in the game that hadn't gone the way you had planned?

TA: No sir. The attitude in the dugout was the same it was last year. We got down, nobody panicked, and we got back to work. That's the way we did it and we found a way to win the ball game.

Q: Did you feel like you guys got justice at the 8th inning after not being able to hit anything for the beginning of the game?

TA: Yes sir. There for a little bit we weren't giving Ethan much of a break but we [had] three barrels and then we were back in the field. Finally, if you keep hitting the ball hard enough, it's going to find a hole somewhere. That's what ended up happening. The 8th inning was a big inning and the rest is history.

Q: Has the ball been carrying like that in batting practice?

TA: Me and Coach Gautreau have really been working on me backing the ball up and really using the opposite side of the field. I feel like I really hit that ball really good. I had an idea it would go out, but all I did was see a ball up, a good pitch to hit, take a good swing on it and let the rest take care of itself.

Jordan Westburg

Q: What were you seeing tonight and what was working for you tonight?

JW: I was just taking advantage of what they gave me. They gave me a lot of fastballs in, so I was trying to get a good swing on them. I was trying to wait for my pitch. I know there's a lot of close pitches and a lot of guys and a lot of guys hitting balls hard, so I was just trying to take advantage of what I got.

Q: What was the atmosphere like for you tonight?

JW: It was amazing. It was exactly what you dream about, Opening Day at the "New Dude." The atmosphere was awesome. Even though it wasn't the best weather, our fans still showed up and showed out and we really appreciate that.