

## Indiana vs. UIC Baseball

### NCAA Louisville Regional | Jim Patterson Stadium | June 1, 2019

Indiana Coach Jeff Mercer: (Opening statement) "I'd like to start by talking about UIC and Coach Dee. Coach Dee really is, truly, and I don't say this very much -- you have to earn it -- but Coach Dee is one of the best coaches in college baseball. I played against Coach Dee when I was a player at Wright State. I coached against him as an assistant, recruited against him, played against him as a head coach, he is one of the best baseball minds in the country. He is a brilliant tactician, one of the best pitching coaches in the country. Every time I play UIC, it's always like that. It is always a fight. They're so tough. Their coaches, they did an incredible job. The sum of their parts is always better than the individual pieces when we play UIC. Always. They are just so intelligent, they play so hard, they pitch, they play great defense. What we tend to do with our players is modeled and based off of what UIC has always done. And anytime you're coaching against them is so terrific, so driven, and disciplined. It forces you to be better. And a lot of what I've done in the past in my coaching career has been around finding a way to compete against Coach Dee. So, let me make sure I said that. And they did it again today. They were just tough. They're very tough, they're very disciplined, and it was a good win for our club to go out and have to play a game like that and find a way to come out on top. I have the absolute utmost respect for Coach Dee and his program."

**(On how gratifying to pitch well when your team needs you to, but also in front of family and friends like that today?)** Gabe Bierman: "Yeah, that support is awesome. I love having the most support in the stands. I mean, I also have brothers beside me to support me as well, so I have it pretty great."

**(On Saalfrank was struggling a little bit, but Gabe comes in and gives you guys those consecutive scoreless innings and gives you some room to kind of build a lead so you could kind of take control of the game. How does that change the feeling in the dugout)**

Matt Lloyd: "I mean, it's everything. Let's your offense work a little bit more. He did a great job today, we're all very proud of him."

(About the pitch Lloyd hit out). "Switching up the pitch a little bit. Switched up the juju. Went to a 2-0 count. Guys in front of me did a great job getting on base. And then got a 2-0 slider over the middle of the plate and put my barrel on it and carried it out of the ball park."

**(On what was the hardest time in the pressure situation of a big tournament. How are you able to pull himself together in a short time)** Gabe Bierman: "You know it's just the trust in my teammates behind me and just going out there and executing pitches that's all we can do, and they're making plays for me."

Coach Jeff Mercer: "And I will say he is a tough dude, and I asked Gabe before we go back at the last inning, and I just says: just give us what you got, just pour it out one more time. I'll speak on his behalf because he is a modest guy. But his resolve --- his results are good and he has been able to play because

of his resolve. He is just so composed and so tough for such a young guy it is just fully impressive. He just trust and trust and trust who he is. He trust who he is, more than what he is. His stuff is good but who he is special.”

**(On Bierman’s reaction in getting to play this regional in Louisville and then how many fans and family members attended)** Gabe Bierman: “I mean it’s heart-warming I guess. Being around family and being around teammates is just pretty awesome either way anywhere we go. I guess just being in Louisville is kind of special so. I had a pretty big fan base up there.”

**(About Cole Barr and Matt Lloyd both hitting homers in the same game on several occasions including today)** Matt Lloyd: “I know I always joke with him and say like he cannot hit one unless I hit one. I mean I guess it’s accidental, just getting on the roll I guess so. Six times this year and same games, it’s just crazy. He just wants to be like the older guy, he wants to be like the older brother. I gotta show him how to do it I guess.”

**(About the difference in hitting today and yesterday)** Matt Lloyd: “It was just getting back to what we have been doing all year. Coach Mercer always talks about how we have learned how to do it in the past three or four games and then we got away from it and then we got back to what we were doing before. Getting pitches up and hitting into the biggest part of the field. Working on our fastball timing, having discipline with two strikes – going back to what we have been doing for the majority of the season.”

**(On yesterday’s loss to Illinois State)** Jeff Mercer: I would say that we did score seven runs yesterday. I understand that we stubbed our toe so that it doesn’t look poetic, it doesn’t look beautiful but we did score seven runs in our defense. When we do things right, we score in bunches. And when we don’t do it right, it looks as bad as it did yesterday. To their credit, and I was frustrated yesterday and rightly so, we were able to put some innings together and score seven runs. We had some defensive miscues that cost us three or four runs. They did put together stretches together and score seven runs. If you take care of the ball, seven runs should win you the ball game on a Friday night. It should win you a game at a regional on a Friday night. To their credit, they did enough to win it. It wasn’t beautiful but I wanted that to be said. I was obviously frustrated about the game.

**(About Matt Lloyd’s mustache)** Matt Lloyd: “Last night, I tried to switch up the vibe a little bit, switch up the juju. So Ryan has a mustache and I don’t know if you saw Pauly’s beard but it is pretty interesting.”

**(On going with Andrew Saalfrank as a starter)** Jeff Mercer: “Honestly, it comes down to matchups. He was pitcher of the year and an All-American. At this time of the year, those things are irrelevant, if we hadn’t pitched Andrew today they would have thrown tomatoes at me. You have to look at a club and that (Scott) Ota kid is a great player for them and several of their better players are lefthanded. You’d like a breaking ball from a lefty. He was a better matchup no matter who we played tomorrow. There was a conversation about Gordon throwing this game as well, and who would be better out of the pen. We felt like (Tanner) Gordon was better of out the pen than Saalfrank is, so it was a combination of a lot

of things but it really didn't come down to Andrew being the Big Ten Pitcher of the Year so he has to pitch today. They are all capable of having success, but we felt like the matchup with UIC was better for Andrew and the matchup coming out of the pen if we needed it was better for Tanner. And then if we got to tomorrow, then Tanner was a better matchup against Louisville."

**(On talk about Gabe not playing or taking time away and him pitching so well)**

Jeff Mercer: "There certainly was talk of that. You have to build a relationship with your players to understand who they are and what they need. We try really hard to get to know our players personally and get to know them away from baseball. As I sat down with Gabe through that moment, through his moment of crisis, we all spent time with him as a coaching staff and his grandfather. We talked about it. I asked him the day after I asked 'what would you like me to do? Would you like me to keep you on the active roster?' From our standpoint for the team, he's our best bullpen guy, but that's irrelevant in these moments. And so I just asked him you lead me a little bit. And he kind of looked at me like, that's the dumbest question that I've ever heard in my life. He just said that I've been doing so well. I want to be with my brothers, I want to be here, this is what I want to do. I don't want to stop improving, I don't want to stop going, I want to help this team win. I said if that's what we do, and you're comfortable being on the roster, then are you comfortable being the first guy out, or when the situation calls for it? He's like give me the ball. Give me the ball, I'm ready when you need me. You've seen him he's a tremendous kid. He just wants to help. I think often times sports for everyone as a fan, sports are a release. The earth's not going to shift its axis today if we win or lose for anybody. The sun is going to come up tomorrow and it's going to move on. So sports are a release. Having all your teammates around you is a relationship -- that's a family. Those are the people, for those kids they lift together at 6 a.m. they live together they sleep they eat they go to class. It becomes the fabric of who you are as a person. So for Gabe, it's also his safe space, it's also his release. To be able to do the thing that he enjoys, what he's very good at to be with the people that value him as a person first and foremost. And then to go out and try to help that club do something worthwhile, is a worthy endeavor. I think that's where the decision from Gabe's standpoint came from. And why he's able to handle such terrible adversity, such terrible difficult times with such grace and class. We've all been very proud of him."

**(On Gabe pitching near his hometown under the circumstances)**

Jeff Mercer: "I said this earlier in the week after the conference tournament when he was in to finish the game. I'm a man of faith and I don't push it a ton. It's my personal decision, I know Gabe is as well, we've had that discussion. I don't know that these kind of circumstances like that anything is ever meant to be, but that wasn't meant to be. But maybe it's God's way of being able to really support Gabe to the best of his abilities in the most difficult time of his life. To be around family, to be close to home. I do feel his grace in this moment for Gabe and to be able to just really support him in an emotional way. Baseball, whether he pitches well or not, I told him that I don't care. I just want you to go out and do the best you can. You're not pitching for anyone else. You're pitching for yourself. You're just going to do the best you can. If you do well, that's great. And if you don't, that's fine. So, it is special. I think maybe there is a piece of it that's meant to be and there's a piece of it that God's grace and being around Gabe and being able to support him in that moment it very special. I'm glad that he's able to do those things and find some inner solace and peace for himself."