

1186 | The Pod – Episode III with Kevin McMullan -Transcript

Welcome once again to the latest edition of 1186, the podcast, the official podcast of the UVA baseball program. We should say the 8-0 Virginia baseball program coming off a win Wednesday night against VMI. In the midst of a five-game homestand, UMass will be here this weekend starting for... Starting Friday afternoon for three games, we are joined as we are every week by Scott Fitzgerald, Andrew Ramsbacker, and pinch hitting this week, we are joined by the associate head coach of the UVA baseball program, Kevin McMullen. Coach Mac, I know you've been asking nonstop when you got to appear on the podcast, so finally able to make it happen. How excited are you to be here this week?

Yeah, so excited. I'm thankful you guys are considering me in this podcast.

It really is an honor, right?

An esteemed list. Brian O'Connor, Ryan Zimmerman, Kevin McMullen. Big three. We might have to stop it at that one. But really quickly, we might as well, like we talked about, off to an 8-0 start. Got a couple of really big wins this past weekend in Florida. A lot of come-from-behind wins, putting runs on the board. What are your impressions of not necessarily being 8-0, but the way you guys are playing through these first eight games of the season?

Yeah, there's been a lot of ups and downs. I think some of the things that stick out to me has been the poise of our players, you know, getting down behind games and not panicking and just, you know, staying with their routines and their processes and just continuing to play good baseball. And at some point, hopefully the dam would break and it's happened for us. Obviously, as you mentioned, we're 8-0, but we're playing good baseball and The guys are showing extreme amount of poise in some critical situations, and that's a good sign. And, you know, you're going to need it on the long haul with all the games that are in front of us and the challenges that lie ahead. Poise is really important.

Yeah, Mac, you mentioned poise, and obviously a theme to these early wins has been come from behind victories, where you've been down early, sometimes late, and you figured out a way to get it done, particularly down in Jacksonville against three quality opponents in that tournament. When you compile those kind of wins and those kind of stressful environments early on, what does that do for a team throughout the course of the season?

Yeah, I think it thickens their skin up and they can play one pitch at a time and they don't have to worry about the end result because they've had a little bit of that experience, how to manage those emotions. Again, like I said, be able to be poised through those challenging pieces of a game and just continue to stay the course and do what we do. I think we preach it all the time is, you know, make sure you take care of the game the way we feel like it should be played. And at the end of the day, whatever comes, comes. But I think we've stayed in the moment. We played one pitch at a time, and that's that's going to be critical moving forward.

Along those same lines, Oak, two weeks ago in the first edition of this podcast, was talking about just sort of how guys have to learn how to win. And getting to Omaha last year, guys got a lot of experience in those tough, close ballgames. And so many of those guys are back this year. How much do you think that is contributing to the way they've been able to show that poise and kind of stick it out and find ways to win these ballgames early this season?

Yeah, I think it's critical, you know, it's things you can rely on because there's a root system to them. They know what's going on. They've been at it before. They can obviously share that with their teammates that, hey, just keep playing and it'll go our way if we continue to have the right mindset. And I think that experience just slows the process down for these guys. And obviously they're influencing their younger teammates as well and the new teammates.

So you've been here two decades now. You've been here the whole time with Oak. What, I guess, go back to the beginning. What brought you here? What was your connection to Oak? How did you even wind up here?

Back in, I don't even know what year it was. There was a opening at Notre Dame and Brian and I started talking. I was the acting head coach at East Carolina at the time. And their administration wanted to go a different way. And so in that about a two week window, Brian and I started talking. We competed against one another when I was at St. John's. And so when this job come open, I was in professional baseball at the time, young family. So I wanted to be in the college environment. I thought it would be able to be good to be home for breakfast and dinner. In the summer, you could manage it a little bit more from a recruiting standpoint. I think it was just at that time a better thing for my family. And so in those processes talking, we had a connection. And when this job came open, we spoke a little bit. I drove up here. I was managing a team in Danville with the Braves and took a look around and was really impressed with like, wow, this is something special that I think, you know, with their academic reputation, And what we think we could build here in the Mid-Atlantic area from a baseball standpoint, I thought it was really a special opportunity.

And obviously those first days, right, you, Coach O'Connor, Karl Kuhn, the pitching coach at the time, it's a real rags to riches stories, maybe literally, as you guys started off as this began here in that summer, all those years, 21 years ago. Can you fill the audience in on your living conditions with your two new coaches that first summer over here and trying to build this program?

Well, I got to be honest with you. I got here in late August. So I think Coach Kuhn, Coach O'Connor, as I dribbled in from my other responsibilities, we lived in a place called the Chateau, which was I think out on Fifth Street, somewhere out that way. And it was basically a one-bedroom efficiency. Someone slept in the bedroom, someone slept in the couch area, and someone slept in the entrance to the building. So you had a cot, and you basically got up as early as you can, got to the office, and started working. But it was a good way to start because, you know... You're on top of one another. You're sharing information. Your phone's ringing. So it was a good start. And we had a chance. There was, I think, a food lion right next to the Chateau.

We could put our groceries in the cart, push it to the Chateau, put them in the fridge, and bring the cart back to the food line. It was pretty cool to be around one another in that setting. And it was pretty cool because everybody was OK with the setting. It wasn't like anybody was uncomfortable. And that says a lot about who we are as a group.

Did you feel like you were back in college? You just had these new roommates, and did you have to get used to each other's sleeping regimen and stuff like that? What was that part like?

We really didn't spend much time there other than sleep. We spent most of the time in the office. We'd come back there, basically put your head on the pillow, get up six hours later and rinse and repeat is what it was. And some giggles and laughs, but not too much that we spent there socially at all. We also had our volunteer, James Molinari. He was sleeping in the entranceway as well. So we made it work. It wasn't a three-man show. It was a four-man show at the time. And yeah, We got through it, and I think we probably got pretty good friendships because of it.

Who was the first to move out? How did we dissipate from all this? I think whoever's family got there first. I think Brian's family might have got first, and then Karl's found a place, maybe apartment or a condo. I forget what it was. And my family wasn't even there yet. Luckily, when I got my family there, I got to use the Chateau for about a week before we found where we're going to live. And everybody was out of the place already.

Very cool. Who got the bed?

The head coach should get the bed. I figured that was the case, yeah. I'm really not sure, but he would be willing to give it up too. But I'm not sure exactly who slept in the bed every night. I know I didn't sleep in the bed, so I do know that.

So what has, obviously you've been here, so much success, so many trips to Omaha, 2015, the national championship. What has kept you here? I know there have been opportunities to maybe become a head coach. What has kept you here for so long?

I mean, it's two things. I love my job and I love the lifestyle I'm living. I think that's important when you're a dad, you're a coach, that those are two really important things. And, uh, I love our players. I love my role on this staff. Uh, obviously love the Charlottesville community. All of our kids were raised here and so those are the simplest ways to say it. I love my job. I love being at a place where we've, we've started from, uh, the ground and we built it up and, uh, I have autonomy in what I do, which is, I think, important. And that's with great respect for Oak and giving me the opportunity. I'm grateful for it. Every day I wake up, I'm glad I'm here and wake up and try to keep trying to continue to be the best version of a perfect climate for me.

When you got here, did you expect it would work out?

Yeah, it's a great question. I don't really know. I've been everywhere three years and have moved on. I think when I started having a family, one of the reasons I wanted to be in this environment was to be able to raise a family and have the opportunity. You work a lot as a baseball coach, but it's more of a lifestyle instead of just saying, okay, I'm a coach and then I'm a dad. We've made it a lifestyle, Sandy and I, my wife, and the kids love baseball. My girls still check in all the time, see how we're doing. And my son is a freshman at Liberty playing. Well not playing, but he's in the program at the moment. And so it's a lifestyle for us. We love it. Our families love it. Our extended families are part of it. And so it's tough to get a better situation. You talk about autonomy.

Give us a glimpse of what working with Coach O'Connor and pretty much the whole staff. I think in the 1186 documentary, where our athletic trainer, Brian McGuire, says it best, Coach O'Connor lets you do, pretty much do it your way. But he's got a finger on the pulse on everything. So give us a peek inside of the inner workings on how you guys operate.

Yeah, I think the communication, number one, right? You've got to share and say, you know, you always got to keep your boss involved, right? And Oak is one of those guys you can, we think alike a little bit. And so when you share different ideas, hey, I'm considered doing this. What are your thoughts? You just basically share. And if it aligns, then you move forward. If it doesn't, then you got to take a step back and say, okay, I really like this. Let's have another conversation. Or you know what? I understand we can turn the page, whether it be recruiting, whether it be opponents you play, how you're going to play versus these certain opponents. All of it is basically communicated. And if you can communicate when things happen, there's no really shock factor at all. Like, why did we do that? Well, we've practiced it. We've talked about it. We do it. And that's what I mean by autonomy. Like, you can communicate, but you also can have the freedom. You don't have to look over your shoulder and say, is this the right thing? Is my boss worried about if this is going to happen or not? Because it's been discussed already.

You mentioned recruiting, and that's been among your many roles, certainly a prominent one over the years. And that area that you tap into so often is the area that you come from, right? Up there in the Northeast and things like that. When you first arrived there representing UVA, what was the perception of the program? And how has that evolved? And how have you leveraged your relationships in the Northeast to continue to bring that pipeline to UVA?

I don't, I don't know initially if we ever just said, Hey, you know, we're at the university of Virginia. You do things based on relationships and the recruiting process. So I just, you know, you follow through with the guys that you've had success with in the past. I think you reach out to the guys that understand who you are and, and what our program's about. You do that obviously over relationships and times or players come to your place and they have a good experience. So, you know, I think all those things funnel into recruiting contacts. Number one, You always go back to where you know people. Obviously, our focus here is to try to recruit the state first that is the right player academically and athletically that fit our place. That's what we want to do. And then just branch out from there and see who's the right fit. And most of the time when you have those relationships, Those particular coaches or travel coaches or high

school coaches know what you like. And so it's it's a mutual thing that they reach out to you or you check in with them and say, hey, we're looking for this. We're looking for that. Do you have anybody? Have you competed against anybody? Is there anyone you could suggest? And you just continue to stay on the phone and work your relationships. And sooner or later, you find the right matchup. And when you get him on a visit, I think it's a great place to come because it's a beautiful place. We have exceptional academics, right? You got exceptional baseball. And it's an easy sell if you find the right people through your connections.

I always find it amazing, the recruiting process. you know, how you're able to identify a kid you know, 14 years old, 15 years old, 16 years old, and project what a guy's going to be. When you sit down at a recruiting event or a high school baseball game, what are, like, some of the factors that you're looking for? Obviously, you're there, so you know athletically you should be a guy that you're considering. But is there, you know, any factors that put a guy over the edge or – something that you're kind of honing into rather than just the nuts and bolts of being a baseball player?

Yeah, I think it starts with the skill set. Do they have the skill set to play at our level and play at our level every day, not just as a part-time player? And then how they go about their business. Are they focused in what they're doing? Do they run a hard 90 out of the box every time? Do they run on and off the field? All those little things that you're trying to maybe figure out the character trait of the player. You know, you can talk to, you know, the coaches, you can, you can talk to the travel coaches, but you know, your eyes usually tell you the truth and you decipher all that information and say, okay, he's a great fit for our place. Love how he goes about his business. Maybe he's a B player, but his mentality is an A player. Maybe he's a draft guy that I'm not going to waste my time on this guy because he's too talented. Right. And are we going to waste four or five or six months of energy on the guy? And then he's going to sign a professional draft. So there's there's a lot of moving parts to it. But I think the bottom line is, is he talented enough? Does he go about his business the right way? Is he a guy you want to put in that locker room and affect the other 39 guys that are on the team?

That kind of leads into something we were talking about before we got started. Uh, I think Ernie Clement is the example. We all come back to some of those, maybe diamonds in the rough, who you come across, who maybe don't jump out to you at first. And then you start to notice a little bit more, you know, this guy might be able to play for us.

Um, Ernie, like I said, is a great example of it. Who like, who are some of the other guys you can think of who have there been others who have kind of worn on you over time and won you over? Well, I think about a guy like Jake McCarthy who's in the big leagues now, right? Joe, his brother, was in our program. My friends in that space, in that area, were like, hey, man, this guy's better than his brother Joe. And so the first time I saw Jake, I was like, okay, he can really run. He didn't have a great day, but, you know, the family tradition and the history of the family is really good. I thought Jake had one of the best freshman years he could ever have in – in college baseball when he was a freshman at our place. And I knew they played football. I knew their dad was a football, baseball guy. Some people in that space that I know were like, he's

better than Joe. And I'm like, well, you know, I go there the first time to see it. And he didn't light me up with the bat, but he ran really well. The history of what we knew with Joe when he got here and his poise and toughness. I'm like, you know, this isn't easy. And it's a brother combination. And I think he wants to come to Virginia. And so and then when he got here, he was way better than I thought he was. You know, so but the traits of what we want in the athleticism of our guys and the mentality, he fit it perfect. I just didn't see him perform great in the first couple of times. And after he was committed, he came here to a tournament. I'm like, oh, yeah, that was the right guy. But at the time, you know, initially when we moved on him to give him an opportunity, the performance piece hadn't been seen by my eyes. But all the information shared with me from the people I know in that space legitimized it when I saw it the second time. I

remember getting yelled at. Andrew, I think he yelled at both of us, Mac did, for retweeting all of Jake's football stats. You're going to lose him to football.

I want to ask you about that. I don't think the people know that, you know, this, you know, Mac, you yourself, obviously this program is built on like multi-sport guys, right? Like, like Jake and Joe McCarthy being prime examples of legitimate Ernie, another one, a hockey player up in Rochester who also played soccer. There's a bunch of those guys, but you yourself, right? We're a multi-sport guy.

The Bo Jackson of IUP, right?

Definitely Bo Jackson.

More Deion Sanders. He's got more flash.

Yeah, yeah, yeah. Of course.

But how does – you kind of practice – you practice now what you preach, right? You were a multi-sport guy. I've talked to Oak before. He was a multi-sport guy in high school in Iowa. So how do you funnel – What benefits did you get, I guess, out of being a multi-sport guy that now you use to look into guys you recruit and why you bring so many of those guys here through the program?

Yeah, I think, you know, I wrestled growing up, played basketball, obviously football, baseball. And I think in college I was a two-sport athlete. I wrestled a little bit my first winter in college and then they dropped the program and I just went back to playing spring football. So I think it gives you a different variety of how you've been coached. You know, football is a different way than baseball. Wrestling is a little bit different. My high school wrestling coach was a drill sergeant in the Marine Corps, and, you know, you did things the right way. It was very targeted. So I think being involved around those other sports gives you an advantage in baseball because a lot of baseball stuff is not as organized, not as structured, not as disciplined. It's way more now because of all the club teams and the academies. But when I was growing up, I thought my

edge was that – You know, all the discipline you had to have in those other two sports definitely affected when I got into college to play baseball, not so much as a high school player. But then when I got to professional baseball, I think it gave me a mental edge of the challenges that those other sports give you just to win a day at a time. And, you know, you can get knocked on your tail five times in a football game, but it's really what do you do when it counts? And so there's a carryover, and I try to – share with our players as often as you can that you know this is a game of failure and how you're going to deal with it are you going to keep going are you going to you know go in the corner and hide and I think some of those other experiences as an athlete allow me to help those guys get through some of those challenging times.

Going back to you were talking about Jake and Joe McCarthy, they're a great example. Obviously, the Teel brothers, Aiden Te3l's here now. You've had a lot of success recruiting brothers in your time here. The Gelof brothers, obviously another great example. What goes into that whole dynamic when you already have an older brother who's been here or is currently here having that kind of success, and then the younger brother too? What is that dynamic like when you're going through that whole process?

It's actually pretty easy, right? The first one's the tough one, right? Because that's the guy you're recruiting. And the second one, if the older brother has had a good experience here, it usually trickles down to the younger brother. And then you have those relationships with the parents. They know us. We're transparent. We're pretty truthful with them. We're pretty honest. forthright with them. So I think most parents are comfortable with the second kid coming because they know the experience of the first guy. We have, you know, a guy on our team whose younger brother's committed. I can't say it because he's a 25, but the same thing. I think it's... It's easier for the second one. And it's great for us that if we think there's a guy that's the right fit, we'll move on him academically and athletically. He's the right fit for our place and a person. And we put him in that clubhouse. I think it's an awesome opportunity because that guy that's coming here as a freshman, he's got three or four years of coaching from his brother before he's ever gotten here of what the expectations are and what the standards are every day.

Who are some of your favorite coaches? We talked about recruiting. Now when guys get here, who are some of your favorite development stories? Maybe guys who got here and put in the work and just put their head down and took care of business in their time here. Brandon Guyer is one of them that comes to my mind. You know, Brandon was a football player playing baseball and, and the daily effort he put in every day to get better was, you know, probably why he made it to major leagues. Um, I think Joe McCarthy was a heck of a player. He was a football player. He looked a little bit rigid, but he was an exceptional player, paid attention to the details, got better in the process. Those are two guys that, you know, there's a lot of guys, right? We've been here a long time. Those are two guys that just stand out to me a little bit. Ernie Clement was one of those guys. You talk about the recruiting process. Ernie came here to camp at a recommendation from Coach Chris New, a buddy of his from that Rochester area. And he's like, this guy's a ballplayer, Mac. I said, well, send him to camp. So he came to camp. And you could see it in flashes, but he was 135 pounds. He wasn't strong yet. He was like a fawn, you know? And then the next summer, he comes to the tournament we're having at our place, and I see

him smoke like a one-hop off the fence, double that here at the stadium. I go follow him, see him play over at maybe at Albemarle High School, hits a couple home runs there. I'm like, this guy's got bat-to-ball skill. He's now 155. He's really big and strong. He's 20 pounds heavier. and made all the plays and just had a, just had a presence about him. Like, okay, this guy's a player. And then you go back to your, you know, recommendations that Chris news gave us. And I'm like, okay, let's, let's talk to him after the tournament. When you could do that back in the day, you sit down and have a conversation with him. He was interested in the schools that were other schools that were recruiting them. He said this would be his prime. And so we moved on it a little bit. We, we had an agreement and, He was an incredible player for us and not sure if we knew we were going to get that out of him that we did get out of him.

One guy that came here, I think, with a little more of an amateur kind of reputation, a high school reputation, I think it was a high school American, was Pavin Smith when he arrived in that class with Ernie Clement back in 2015. Obviously, he was a big part of your national championship team in 2015. Adam Haseley, too. Adam Haseley also was kind of in that same mold, right? Two guys from Florida. And then you had Ernie, who was kind of like the wild card, who kind of played that third fiddle there of the big three of that class and led the national championships. Pavin obviously goes on to to get drafted high along with Adam um in the draft a few years later and he's now at the Arizona Diamondbacks last year diamondbacks are in the world series and he's facing josh sporz a guy who uh obviously starred here as a pitcher was the most outstanding player of that 2015 college world series uh we've asked oak this before um but as someone who watched these guys compete in college on your team what was it like to watch that on that stage facing one another on such a high, high stage of the World Series.

Yeah, that's why you coach, right? To see those opportunities in front of you, not knowing how it's going to work out. Obviously, Josh Sborz usually always delivers. And, you know, I'm on the other side of that because I want Pavin to get a knock, but I don't want him to do too much damage, you know? And I think it's cool. It's... It's a reflection of their hard work, them putting it in, their winning mentalities. They're on teams playing for the obviously World Series championship. And they had the same mentality when they're here there. They were winners and they tried to win an intrasquad. They try to win in prep every day. And so it was awesome. It was great to see. And I wish Jake McCarthy was healthy because he probably would have been in that mix as well.

I don't know if a lot of people know this, and there's a direct correlation, but since 2009 in the ACC, Virginia has had as a team batting average of .302, which is the highest. In that time, 2009, that's six College World Series appearances, one national championship. In your time as the primary hitting instructor here, what's kind of your approach because that takes incredible amount of consistency, um, in your, I guess, hitting approach. What can you kind of dive into how you work with batters and, and, um, I guess, develop that consistency as a team, as a whole, because you're going to have the one-offs that Kyle Teels that are going to bat .400, but for a team over a 14, 15 year span to have a .300 team batting average is incredible.

Well, good players. Good players, consistent messages, high standards, the ability to adjust when need be, and the opportunity to trust what the information is because you've had players before that have bought into what you do. I don't want to get in specifics of what we do, but I think we're detailed in what we do every day. We have a plan. We make adjustments necessary based on what the game is telling us to do, and then we prepare those guys every day with all that information. So they're flexible. If they're facing it, multiple styles of guys yesterday, we, we faced eight guys and there were eight different guys. And so just, just the consistency of the message of how you go about it, the adjustments necessary in the circumstance and continuing to hear the same message over and over at some point, it usually gets a root system and they can see it with their own eyes and believe it. And then they continue to do it over and over.

All right, Mac, before we let you go, Scott brought it up earlier in the documentary, 1186. The name of this podcast is 1186, the podcast. Oak credits you for coming up with the 1186 branding for this baseball program. And it's synonymous with this program, essentially, at this point. Did you measure that yourself? Did you make that drive?

Yeah. I didn't make the drive. We got those Google Maps or I don't know what it was at the time.

MapQuest, right?

Probably MapQuest.

Yeah, MapQuest. That's what it was. MapQuest and said, hey, Charlottesville to Omaha. It came up 1186. We started putting it on everything just because that was a challenging task at the time when we first got here. But I think when there's a destination of what you want to do and every day you can use that as a reference to say, okay, we're moving that way. I don't know how many miles we are, but you got a final destination. And I think it helps you continue to reel guys in and believe in the message daily that this is what it's about. And when you think about that, you sort of forget about your day and you go back to what's important for the group and, That's been our mission statement since we got here.

Last thing really quickly, just how cool is it from your perspective to see what all this has become?

Yeah, I mean, I remember pulling up the road when I was coming from Danville to meet with Brian a little bit and see what the place was all about. And to see it evolve is it tells you a little bit about. Brian's ability to communicate and get things done, trust, right? Community has gotten behind us. Our athletic department has gotten behind us. And it's just been evolving. It's been continuous. It's not been a... just a slam dunk and everything else is layups. It's been continuous. It's been moving the ball in the right direction, passing the ball, playing defense when you got to play defense, all those things. And it's a contributor, what kind of leader Brian is and the trust and the belief that people have in him and continue to grow. And it's not done yet, right? You still continue to push it and There's one thing I know about Oak is that he's not

satisfied in any way, shape, or form about anything. And if you challenge him on satisfaction, he pushes the needle all the time and will work until it gets better and better.

Was that a multi-sport analogy I heard in there? Yeah, yeah. I think that's just part of my DNA.

That seems like a pretty good place to wrap this up, Mac. Thanks for taking the time to join us. Hopefully we'll have you on again soon. I hope this wasn't too painful for you. As we said, the Hoos are home for more of this homestand. They got UMass this weekend, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and then Penn State here for a matinee on Tuesday. For Scott, for Andrew, for Coach Mac, I am Damon Dillman. Thanks for joining us once again on 1186 The Podcast. We'll see you again next week. Thank you, man.