

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday March 13, 2019

Allen Edwards

Justin James

Jordan Naughton

Wyoming Cowboys

New Mexico - 78, Wyoming - 68

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Wyoming head coach Allen Edwards and student-athletes Justin James and Jordan Naughton. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH EDWARDS: Well, good game. I thought obviously in the first half we played some of our best basketball, defending, also rebounding the basketball, even within their pressure. I thought they tried to speed us up, which I thought, at times, I thought they were successful.

But the second half I thought, again, some self-inflicted wounds. I thought we got a little bit careless with the basketball and wasn't assertive, in a sense of trying to attack their pressure but also being smart on the other end after taking it and getting it across half court.

And then I thought they kind of wore us down a little bit in the sense of guys probably getting a little tired. But love the fight from this group from what they've been through all year. They've always come out with the right energy in practice, also in games; tonight it wasn't any different. We just happened to come out on the wrong end of it. But proud of the guys and just what they just tried to continue to do as the season went on.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Justin, about the pressure, it looked like in the first half you handled it well. Second half they tried to speed you up. Did you get kind of caught in that, wear you down or a combination, or how would you assess that?

JUSTIN JAMES: There were a few times they did speed us up -- me, A.J., Jake, all the guards. Yeah, we did a really good job in the first half just continuing to play our pace, get the right shots we wanted.

But I feel like in the second half it was kind of like a panic because they were making shots. So that's on



me, just having the ball in my hands dictating the pace and just making the right shots. But they did a good job. All credit to them. That's a hell of a basketball team.

Q. You mentioned they were making shots but you weren't making as many shots in the second half. Was that part of the panic or maybe the pressure, too, when you guys weren't making shots?

JUSTIN JAMES: No, not really. We usually don't stress about missing shots because all of us are confident that those shots will eventually go in. It was mostly on the defensive side. We had a lot of turnovers that led to transition buckets. And then we didn't rebound the ball well in that second half either.

So it wasn't the offense. Coach always preaches it's not the offense; the offense is going to be fine. But that second half on the defense is where we lost it.

Q. You guys were up 13 with about 15 to go. They had the lead five minutes later. Have you ever been a part of just a momentum swing like that? And I guess what other than panic do you think contributed to that in that specific spurt?

JUSTIN JAMES: It wasn't really like -- I played a lot of basketball in my career. I've been a lot, a part of a lot of swings on our side and their side.

But I was just trying to have my team focus in on just relaxing and playing our game. But all credit to them. They did their job. They followed the game plan. They won the game.

Q. Vance Jackson had a personal 13-0 run, scored 17 of 20 for them at one point. What was he doing to be so effective?

JUSTIN JAMES: Nothing, just being aggressive. He was making tough shots, shots that I've never seen him make before. But he's a good player. He stepped up on the big stage and they won the game.

Q. Jordan, Carlton Bragg had 22 and 20 the last game. I know foul trouble was a big part, but what did you do to get him in foul trouble or did you just slow Carlton down from what he did on Saturday?

JORDAN NAUGHTON: We had a mentality going inside a little more in this game, trying to attack him especially from the jump. I felt we did a good job on

that. Felt like on defense we slowed him down, had a lot of help from the other four players on the court. It was a team effort.

If I was in there fronting the post, we have to have backside help, or backside guards helping us. So, really it's just a team effort, bringing the energy, the aggression, and the physicality to the game. It's just a full team effort.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. You talked about Jackson. How big of an impact did he have? And did he surprise you with what he was able to do or did you guys just let him get loose? What were your thoughts on his run in the second half?

COACH EDWARDS: Well, I mean, I thought we lost him a few times in transition. And he got a couple looks, I want to say, at the top of the key.

And no different than any basketball player, once you see the ball go in a couple times your confidence goes up a little bit more. And then I thought he just made some good individual moves that allowed them to gain some momentum as a group.

I thought he caught it off the block a few times made some moves. I thought he attacked our guys off the dribble because -- that's one of the things I told our guys after the game -- I said, when you're talking about the first half compared to the second half was, we did a great job defending and rebounding and taking -- for the most part taking care of the basketball in the first half.

And I thought those three areas hurt us in the second half. The rebound swing changed. I want to say we were either up rebounding one or two, and then we gave up some turnovers that led to easy buckets. And then I thought we didn't do a good job of pressuring the basketball also containing it.

Q. You mentioned their pressure. They pressured you guys some late in the game over the weekend but today pretty much from the jump they extended full court. Did that surprise you at all?

COACH EDWARDS: I told our guys we had to be ready for anything. I thought he had changed up just quite a bit on the year, whether it be pressure man-to-man, 2-3 zone, 1-3-1, matchup. And I told our guys even from our first game at their place we would have to be ready for pressure.

And, like I said, I thought we did a great job handling it in the first half. I thought the second half we got careless. Not only even in the full court. I thought we

got careless in the half court after we broke the press and tried to make what I would call pretty passes rather than simple passes that led to turnovers and allowed them to get back out in transition.

But it wasn't like that wasn't something we covered in the sense of our press break offense or things of that nature. But, I mean, again, I thought for the most part, actually I thought they kind of weared us down a little bit.

J.J. was on his knees a little tired. I thought Banks made some careless ones as well. And I thought after that you're dealing with guys that are not naturally basketball handlers. I think those are the two in our program. T.J. is a skilled (indiscernible) 4. Trace can handle it a little bit in BP, but they're not pure ball handlers.

Q. You bring your four freshmen into this kind of setting, this kind of atmosphere. Their only postseason experience this season. What kind of experience do you think that will give them going forward?

COACH EDWARDS: Well, again, I mean just on the year, they had been thrown into the fire. And actually I thought they stepped up and they've gotten better. Even just looking at them. T.J. -- in both games he didn't score at our place and didn't score tonight. But I thought he actually had a good defensive game for us.

BP and Trace obviously have ability, but I thought they got in, did some good things too, maybe got rushed a few times. And Thompson, I think he has a bright future within the sense of what he'll be able to do as he gets stronger and more reps of playing. I think he's going to be terrific.

But just the atmosphere. Obviously the Lobos travel pretty well in the sense of their crowd. So actually all that was talked to our guys as well. It wasn't, like, we came in here and said, oh, man, Lobos got a lot of people. No. We knew that they traveled well. But we had to be able to sustain something for 40 minutes and I just didn't think we sustained it.

Q. Other than staying relatively healthy, what strides does this program need to make to get this thing back turned around?

COACH EDWARDS: At the end of the day, even if we were healthy this year, I'm not saying we go from four wins to top of the conference, but I think we're in the middle of the pack. But what I thought J.J. did this year, not even from carrying this team for so long, what he did from a leadership standpoint is going to be well impacted with these young men.

And I think the kid -- I want to say the kid, but Hunter Maldonado might be one of the best leaders I've ever been around or potential leaders I've ever been around from a character standpoint -- what he does on the floor, what he does off the floor, what he does in the classroom.

Not having him physically on the floor hurt. But he was just as much of a voice to these young guys as any. So when you look at what these young kids had to go through this year, and you're adding pieces back in -- again, it's not like I'm sitting up here saying we go, even with next year, go from four to where we're winning the championship.

I think what's wrong, I guess, sometimes with society nobody likes to process. And this is a part of the process. And these young men worked hard this year, got better and they went through something that I couldn't simulate in practice. So that can only help them going forward.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.