

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday March 4, 2020

Paul Weir Makuach Maluach Vance Jackson New Mexico Lobos

New Mexico - 79, San Jose State - 66

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by New Mexico.

COACH WEIR: I would just say that the margin, based on our turnovers, is pretty impressive on our part to win a game by 13 with 21 turnovers. And to lose the points off turnovers by 14 points and still win by 13 says a lot about our defense and a lot about actually our offense outside of those turnovers.

So we've got to find a way to clean up heading into tomorrow. It's one of the things that we stress quite a bit. It's probably the most disappointing thing of tonight, but outside of that, like I told them before the game, we just have to win by one -- survive and advance. It's not about all the numbers; it's about getting to tomorrow. And right now we're getting to tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. Vance, I talked to you before the game and asked if you liked the nickname Vegas Vance. After the game, I'll ask you again: What is it about March and coming to Vegas to this tournament that's made your last three games here in March just unlike the rest of your season?

VANCE JACKSON: I don't want to lose. I don't like losing. I feel at this point our back is against the wall as a team, and we want to just keep moving forward and we've got a big one tomorrow against Utah State. And I do like that name.

Q. Makuach, you had a great start. They had that 8-4 lead, and I thought your energy offensively and defensively and I thought there was a period in the late first half you had a tip-in that slowed one of their roles. Your thoughts on your role because I thought you had some big plays both sides of the floor in pretty key moments?

MAKUACH MALUACH: I wanted to come in with energy and just play hard and play defense and rebound. I felt like I did that. People might say he



scored all the points, but came off the back of the defense that our team came in with.

Q. Vance, you were getting the fans fired up and excited. How nice is it when you have a crowd and a fan base that can travel and support you guys the way they did today?

VANCE JACKSON: It feels amazing. We have the best fans; it's like a home court game for us. I think they call it the Pit West. It feels good. Just staying positive and just keep going. They like winning, and they like shows. So, we're going to do that for them.

Q. Vance, at one point you had, I believe, 14 consecutive points for your team. Can you sort of talk how that was going and how you felt in that rhythm?

VANCE JACKSON: Basically just making -- knocking down the shots. I feel like everybody, like, believed in me and I just let it fly and it just went in. That's really about it.

Q. Vance, winning that game against Utah State, end of the regular season, how important was that coming into this tournament, especially now you're face them tomorrow?

VANCE JACKSON: I feel like it was big. It gave us, like, a lot of confidence, you know what I'm saying? A lot of momentum. And we know we're capable of competing with anybody in our conference. I feel like that win was big.

But then again, we've got to forget about it and move on to the next. And we face them tomorrow. I have a bitter taste. I'm pretty sure Makuach has a bitter taste and some of our teammates from last year. So, hopefully we just lock in on a game plan, you know what I'm saying? Cut the turnovers, so Coach can be happy and get the dub.

Q. Vance, since you have that nickname, does it feel different for you to play postseason versus just the regular season? Like do you thrive under pressure or what's going on there?

VANCE JACKSON: No, it's just a game, at the end of the day. And also I don't want to lose. We don't want to lose, you know what I'm saying? If we lose our season is over. So, I'm just trying to do whatever it takes -- rebounding, you know what I'm saying -- playing

defense and helping us win.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you. Questions for Coach.

Q. Paul, obviously you saw what Vance did in his two games last year. Did it again this year. And I know that you've been asked about Vance all season long, when he was having good games or bad games, is this the breakthrough game? Is that the breakthrough game? What's going on with Vance? And then he comes here and does it again. What is it about this week, this setting that you think Vance breaks through and shines like he did last year?

COACH WEIR: Yeah, he's shooting the ball well. We kind of have these competitions how many 3-pointers you can make in a row and different things. And before we left, he won. I think he had 15, 16 in a row at one point. And today during shoot-around he was up to 14 in a row. He's in a groove, shooting the ball well.

I thought he was there before he got hurt. I thought he was in a nice stretch there, and was maybe going to be able to carry it into a really good conference season. But the injuries set him back, set us back. But now he's back and hopefully we'll continue to be able to shoot the ball the rest of the way.

Q. What are some of the challenges of not only turning around and playing again the next day, but playing a Utah State team that you just beat a few days ago? What are some of the differences and different challenges that you expect out of this team compared to when you beat them down at The Pit?

COACH WEIR: Obviously they've had a lot of time to prepare. We haven't. All we've spent time on preparing for was San Jose State. I'm assuming they've obviously been kind of working towards this a little bit. So they might have an advantage that way, but that's why they have the higher seed and they earned that right.

We have to now get back to the hotel and get back to it and put the best game plan we can to try and give ourselves the best chance to win.

Q. Before the Utah State game, did you sense your team was finally starting to figure some things out going into that game?

COACH WEIR: Gosh, if I had to say -- I thought we played well at Air Force. We didn't win. But I thought we did some really good things. Had a chance to win. And we've been practicing really well. We have one game all year, actually thought it was at home against UNLV.

And I thought our home game against UNLV was the

one time I got a little nervous. I said it after the game, I was worried that maybe all this losing and all this stuff that had happened had gotten to us because we just didn't have a lot of pop that game.

But since then I've been watching it and kind of coaching as much optimism and positive energy as I can and we've been good. Like, we've been practicing well. We've been preparing well. We've been engaged. And even though we hadn't really broke through, I still liked where our team was at. Even down 14 against Utah State, I still liked where we were at.

I'm glad we're winning now. I'm glad the shots are going in and people think we've turned the corner, but I never really felt like we were that far out to begin with.

Q. They do come out the second half, 7-0 run, and I want to walk you through that moment. Did you have any of those moments in the timeout or on the bench that we've asked you about throughout the last month, really, those tense moments, was it kind of a "here they come; what's going to happen" this type of thing? Or was it calm, like you said other timeouts have been? And I wanted to follow up, Vance, after their 7-0 run, scores 14 minutes in four minutes, how much, when he gets hot like that, are you opening things up for him or is just his shots are falling and that's all it is?

COACH WEIR: Good point. I don't know what to do with that starting five. I told them that many times. They did not start the first half well or the second half. We bring in Kurt (indiscernible) and the game changes both halves.

I challenged those guys at halftime and said you guys are backing me into a spot here; you're our oldest, most experienced guys, but they're not a good group together. When Vance started making those shots is when Kurt subbed in the game. And Kurt, both times he subbed in, was very impactful for he was plus 22 tonight.

So he helps. He brings defensive energy. He's a ball mover on offense. He's just going out trying to make the right play. And we need more guys like that sometimes in that lineup.

As far as Vance goes, I think some of it is the flow of the game. And obviously it's when he's making shots. The reality is at the beginning of the year his shooting percentages were so low he didn't have a lot of driving opportunities. He was just kind of dared into shooting.

Now that he's making shots, it's opening up the ability for him to get to the basket again. I think it's a combination of both. The guys start looking for him

because they know he's feeling it, but also he's a good basketball player right now. And good basketball players make good plays.

Q. During the first three minutes of that second period you guys didn't have any points but you had five turnovers. Was it something specific San Jose State did?

COACH WEIR: Again, I think that lineup -- I don't know. I gotta keep figuring it out, how to get who I think are our five best players as a group are not great starting either halves. They obviously didn't start the Utah State game. I went back to them here today and I talked to them about it and maybe I'm talking about it too much, because that group itself just has got to give us more. That's the reality of it.

I'm hopeful that if I do stick with it that they're going to find a way to figure it out and play good basketball together at both ends of the court, because you're right, it's not good enough.

Q. Knowing that you guys are hot and you just played in Utah State, just sitting and waiting on you guys, do you think that benefits you guys or benefits them moving into this game tomorrow?

COACH WEIR: You know, we'll probably know tomorrow after the game is the best time to answer it. Obviously they've earned the right. They got the bye. They had a great regular season. We didn't. So whatever advantages they get out of it, they earn those. Whatever disadvantages we've inherited here, we have to work through those and just give ourselves the best chance we can to win.

The game time is good. We've got a little bit of time. We've got 24 hours now to get ready for the game tomorrow night and just give it every single thing we have to try and pull out a victory.