

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday March 5, 2020

Paul Weir

Vance Jackson

Corey Manigault

New Mexico Lobos

Utah State - 75, New Mexico - 70

THE MODERATOR: We'll start with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

PAUL WEIR: Credit to Utah State. They were really good. We kind of went back and forth between man and zone there late to stop Merrill, but I just, I couldn't coach us well enough to a victory. These guys played their hearts out. Unfortunately, I just couldn't create enough defensive stops down the stretch for us to get the victory.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. We'll take questions for the student-athletes first.

Q. For both you guys: This season you guys know it better than anybody you guys lived it. The ups and downs of what went on this season and to be so close again, to have a lead against Utah State, everything seemed to be what you guys expected it to be these last few, this last week or so. How frustrating is it? Would it almost have been in some ways been better had you guys not shown, again, what this team could have been?

VANCE JACKSON: It hurts because we played them last year and lost and we lost this year and it's just crazy because we had it in our hands. We just didn't finish and pull through. So any loss hurts, but this hurts the most because the season is over and now we've got to start over.

Q. Coach, I know this is probably a tough one because obviously you're emotional about it. Could you just talk about when do you think the game got away from you guys?

PAUL WEIR: Really, our inability to stop Merrill and quite frankly my inability to coach us to get some more stops there down the stretch. These guys played their hearts out. I told them in the locker room they did everything they could have done. I just, unfortunately, could not get us a stop there late. Merrill was awesome



and he was better than me.

Q. Vance, what happened with that foul when you got mixed up or tied up with Queta? It was really confusing. I don't know what they told you, but what happened on that situation?

VANCE JACKSON: I just went up with the rebound and his arms just got caught. I didn't do nothing intentionally or nothing. It's just basketball. It's a basketball play.

Q. Coach, yesterday you guys were against San Jose State. Vante Hendrix played. Today he didn't warm up with the team. What happened?

PAUL WEIR: Nothing substantial. Our focus was on trying to win this game. I didn't feel his focus was there, so I sent him home.

Q. Corey, this is the end of your Lobo career. Reflection on kind of what happened this season -- or not what happened, but your memories of a Lobo. Vance, when he's done, curious what your future holds, if it's going to be in a Lobo uniform or not.

COREY MANIGAULT: Just having the greatest coach ever beside me and taking me here, actually working with me and things like that. So just learning from him. Even though he say this game is his fault, we was out there on the floor and stuff like that. So I don't want to say it was a hundred percent him. He's still the greatest coach in my eyes, ever, as I move forward and be ready for my next chapter.

VANCE JACKSON: Right now I'm not even, I can't even really think about what I'm going to do. I'm just, like this loss hurts, so I can't really answer that question for you.

Q. For both of you: I believe Utah State was favored by double digits coming into the game. What was your mentality?

VANCE JACKSON: Winning. Win or go home. They won and we lost and we're going home.

Q. Vance, obviously you started your career at UConn, but in your entire college career has there been a game that you played in that's been this emotional?

VANCE JACKSON: No.

Q. Why was this one so emotional?

VANCE JACKSON: Our team, we have been through so much. We've had so many adversities. We've had so many highs and lows and I built so many relationships. Each and every one of us and coach Weir, like Corey said, he's the best coach that I've ever played for. And just to lose, you know what I'm saying, it just hurts. Coach Weir put so much effort. The whole coaching staff, they put so much effort in just the game plans and everything. And to not win, you know what I'm saying, it just hurts, man. This is his last year. I just want to win for him, so it just hurt.

Q. As you said yourself, there were a lot of ups and downs this season. As one of the leaders of the team, how did you overcome that adversity with all the negative news put out there about you guys?

VANCE JACKSON: Blocking the outside noise. Everybody had their own opinions about what's going on, but deep down inside we're the only ones that know what's going on. So as long as we was just staying together that's all that mattered and just staying positive.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. We'll dismiss the student-athletes at this time. Thank you for coming down, men. Take questions for coach.

Q. You've mentioned Sam Merrill a couple times, the chess match with him. What makes him so difficult to game plan against?

PAUL WEIR: I thought at our place he had issues off the dribble. I thought our ball pressure really bothered him at our place. I thought tonight -- or today, I don't know what time it is, but he just did a much better job with ball pressure. I thought his -- I mean, they kind of let him go there down the stretch. We got stuck in some isos up top. He scored in the lane on an up and under, got to the free-throw line, made that tough three. We went zone. I mean, I just -- I don't know. I didn't do a good enough job. He beat me, at the end of the day. He's a great player and I could not find a way to stop him when it mattered. He can beat you from all three levels, as he showed it, and he was awesome tonight.

Q. I know you got asked earlier. It's really hard to hear out here any of your answers, so I'm going to ask again. Vante Hendrix gets sent home on an airplane this afternoon. What was that about, A, and B, how is this team still, on the final day of your season, facing situations where players are doing things that are taking away from pregame moments, game moments? Situations like this are the stories of this year's team unfortunately for you and this program, and I'm curious what you as a

coach need to do to fix that moving forward and really more to the matter of today, what was today's drama about?

PAUL WEIR: Yeah, I guess it could be looked at -- I'm sorry, I think maybe they turned it up too much -- I guess it could get looked at that way. Really didn't do anything serious at all. Given the time, the intensity of today in the moment, I just felt like we were better off without him. It really wasn't anything serious or anything to worry about, but given the nature of how important I wanted to treat this past week and what I wanted out of our guys just didn't quite meet my expectations.

Q. Is Vance -- I mean, is Vante Hendrix a member of the Lobo basketball team next season?

PAUL WEIR: To be determined.

Q. When Sam Merrill came back with four fouls --

PAUL WEIR: Sam Merrill, Sam Merrill, Sam Merrill. I'm going to see this kid in my -- for a long time. Trey Kell, part two. Yeah, sorry. Sam Merrill. He's amazing. He should be in the NBA draft. He kicked our ass. He kicked my ass. He's a great basketball player. I wish him all the best. He was exceptional tonight.

Q. And then, Coach, you guys started out, Utah State jumped out to a 20-8 lead. What was the adjustments the team made early in the first half to get back in the game and tie it at halftime?

PAUL WEIR: Yeah, that starting five just, unfortunately, I went back to it again. It just has not gotten us off to good starts. Hasn't really in either of these games. Unfortunately, it just wasn't a great group. Bringing in Kurt, again, plus 12 tonight. Unfortunately, him fouling out really hurt us. Kurt's pretty much been our probably most under-appreciated player here in the last couple of weeks. So bringing him in just kind of usually jump starts our team and I thought he was awesome again tonight and unfortunately losing him down the stretch hurt us a little bit.

Q. This was a very dramatic season. What was the biggest take away and what can you do as a coach to have a different type of season next season?

PAUL WEIR: Oh, that's really, I wish I could compact that into a nice tight answer for you, but there's a lot that went on this year in many different levels. On the court, off the court, each of the individual players, maybe myself, and then all of us collectively with our different relationships. But I think at the end of the day, what I've really impressed, I hope I've impressed upon them is just to keep a really good attitude in the face of adversity and just continue to work through it. We finished the season, maybe not strong, but stronger than where we were. When you're down 14 at home to Utah State, I think it's a pretty easy time for a lot of kids

to just pack it in. They didn't. They fought through it. We got that win. We got the next win. And for 30-something minutes tonight we were trying to get this win, just didn't quite have enough. So hopefully these guys, we all want to hold the trophy at the end, but they will learn from this and take these lessons for the rest of their life, just to fight through things when life doesn't go your way.

Q. I'm not sure if you knew this. Vante Hendrix actually did speak out about the situation. He made a tweet virtually implying that he does not know what he did and he's still waiting to hear the reason why he was sent home. Was that argument -- not argument, but was that decision mutual and how did he react when you told him the news?

PAUL WEIR: Again, I was just really trying to get focused for today's game. He is aware. I sent him home and I'll deal with it. We can talk about Sam Merrill, but I don't think we need to talk about Vante Hendrix that much.

Q. I asked your players, need to ask you the same. The plan for you is coming back next year as the Lobo basketball coach? Have you heard anything different?

PAUL WEIR: I have not.

Q. And your desire is to come back as Lobo basketball coach?

PAUL WEIR: It is. Good to go?

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you, coach.