

# Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday March 13, 2019

## Paul Weir

## Makuach Maluach

## Vance Jackson

## New Mexico Lobos

New Mexico - 78, Wyoming - 68

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by New Mexico head coach Paul Weir and student-athletes Vance Jackson and Makuach Maluach. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH WEIR: Wyoming is a terrific basketball team. I thought they showed it tonight. Had a terrific start to the game. Coach and obviously their seniors were really engaged and ready for the matchup.

I thought they gave us a tremendous blow early and pushed us really to the point of elimination. And thankfully we were able to kind of bounce back, finish the game we wanted and get a victory and move on.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

**Q. Vance, 13-0 run there in the first half, personal run, as part of a team run of 15-0. You haven't had that long of a stretch this season and I don't think you had that at UConn. When was the last time you did something like that, and what was it, why was it going on like that?**

VANCE JACKSON: Actually our season is on the line, and, me, personally, and I'm pretty sure the rest of the team and our staff, we just don't want to lose. So we've got to do whatever it takes for us to get it done and that's what happened.

**Q. The way you guys looked in the first half, you guys have looked that bad in other games this year; you guys have had those lows this season where nothing was going right, foul trouble, the other team's just dominating the game. You're down 16 in the first half. Within the same game, to go from that moment to a double-digit victory and the run you had, like, what is it in your guys' minds or in those huddles that changes from one moment of being down 16 to what you guys did in the second half? And you've done it so consistently this year, the ups and downs within games?**

VANCE JACKSON: It's a good test for us. Our coach



has been telling us to stay positive. We always just dwell on when we, like, we get down and things like that. Just staying positive and just playing our hearts out just to keep the season going. I feel like that was the most important for us, just coming together.

**Q. Makuach, a lot of big buckets in the second half with that baseline dunk. That was something I saw earlier in the year in a couple of practices and I saw you do one in the game, but haven't seen you really take that baseline like you did for that dunk. What is it that maybe has held you back from doing that a little bit more, because you often have that lane to drive? And why did you go ahead and do it today?**

MAKUACH MALUACH: Nothing was really falling. I was taking a lot of 3s, and they weren't going down. So I just thought coming back in, and Vance was on a role, so I needed to keep up the energy and not settle, take it to the rim and put the pressure on the officials.

**Q. Vance, back to that run, is that something that can carry over to another game, that will light a spark going forward?**

VANCE JACKSON: Yeah, I feel most definitely, I feel like it can. It's like a little start to the engine and we've got to keep it going and bring the same energy for Utah State.

**Q. What kind of speech did Coach Weir give you during halftime, because you looked totally different from the first half to the second?**

VANCE JACKSON: It was kind of simple. Just stay positive. The game's not over. It's a long game. We've got another 20 minutes. And we've just got to come out with energy. Wyoming, they're a good team, and they came out and punched us first. We was down 16. But gotta keep our heads up and keep playing hard and execute the game plan.

**Q. That sounds like something you've been doing all season because you've obviously struggled. How do you as a team talk to each other to remain positive?**

VANCE JACKSON: Just body language. Keeping our heads up, like, not dwelling off our turnovers or if someone missed them, things like that; just saying, okay, next play, just gotta keep it going, things like that.

**Q. Vance, I had a question for you and one for Makuach as well. Before you had the run, I saw you, you were asking for the ball. And when you didn't get the ball you actually crashed to the boards. So you were doing little things; it wasn't just the scoring. Was there something that precipitated the run prior to it actually taking place?**

VANCE JACKSON: That's what the coaching staff has been telling me at halftime, just personally crash the glass, give us second-chance points and things like that. And that was basically it. Just keep playing, playing hard, showing an effort because little things is what makes the team win.

**Q. Along those lines, the little things, as you just mentioned, question for Makuach, you guys have had some issues closing games out. Less so recently. So talk about you mentioned that baseline drive, but you also had a couple other shots down the stretch as well. What does this mean to be able to find time to close games at this point in the season?**

MAKUACH MALUACH: I mean, it's huge. We've been struggling with all the games, like closing games out. But today we just wanted to come in, be aggressive. Once we got back in the game, we knew we just need to close it out. And just did it, closing out and we just needed to hit free throws and we did that tonight.

**Q. Makuach, so your confidence looked like it was struggling a little. How much confidence have you gained on that steal that Vance had that led to your first dunk?**

MAKUACH MALUACH: I never dwell -- I'm not the one to ever dwell on a shot or missed shot or anything like that. I don't feel like I'm low on confidence. But I just gotta go out there and compete hard and give everything to the team. And I feel like everything would take care of itself.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

**Q. From the first half to second half, I want to start with the first half, you guys looked for -- down 16, you looked as bad as I've seen you guys look this year. Couple shot clock violations and I think back-to-back possessions. They didn't seem to be listening to you guys on the bench. I want to start there and ask what was going on in that first half that was so, I guess, just disjointed in general?**

COACH WEIR: Yeah. I just told the guys after the game I thought the best teaching we can kind of get from this is just how -- we didn't come out in a great emotional state individually. And I can go from Anthony all the way down to guys down the bench. I

just thought we just looked -- nervous is probably the wrong word -- anxious. I thought we were pressing and just didn't really look comfortable to start.

But that all being said, we had 23 deflections at half. The game was at the pace I wanted. I told the guys like this part of playing this pace and this style, it's a second-half, end-of-game kind of thing. And we had the game where we wanted it.

I thought, again, like usual, we missed a lot of layups. We missed some easy stuff around the rim. We missed some good looks. So the offensive stuff can come and go. But I thought defensively we had the game where we wanted it. It was just going to take some more time to get there. And it just took that time to kind of get there.

**Q. Fast forward to the second half, Vance in particular, I know that's sort of the expectations he's had on his shoulders all year, to be that guy a little bit more. I guess it came at a good time, but what got into Vance on the 13-0 personal run to basically save the season?**

COACH WEIR: No, I think all season long I've been really trying to teach him, and actually Kuach as well about just matchups, and understanding who is guarding them, the strengths and weakness of the player, where the ball is on the floor and just attacking it.

I thought with Hunter Thompson guarding him, it was a great matchup for him. And it's been my frustration at times with Vance, there are times when he wants to maybe go make a play and drive on a smaller, athletic guy, or just do things that aren't necessarily in coordination with who's guarding him. But I thought tonight with Thompson guarding him was a great matchup. He was able to take him off the bounce and once he started doing that, it opened himself up from 3. So he really took advantage of the matchup, which was great on his part and helpful to us as well.

**Q. You were pressing again. Looked like last year's Lobos; you hadn't really done that this year. The decision that went into pressing, was it based on the second half trapping success you had Saturday, or did you know all along you might press this whole game?**

COACH WEIR: I would be lying if I said it hadn't crossed my mind. Definitely the last few minutes opened my mind, and those are the clips I showed the guys. Like, hey, look at these, these are the clips; let's look at those clips. And I felt from the matchup perspective it was something we could do, so we've been working on it for a couple of days, kind of getting back to all the drills we did through the fall and other

things like that.

We weren't great at it tonight, but I felt the overall tempo and flow of the game was actually in our favor. Even though Wyoming had some terrific runs and played exceptional, I still liked the flow. I thought it was in our favor and thankfully it did come around.

**Q. The expectations were pretty high for Vance Jackson coming into this season. How big is it that as a sophomore he's showing so much potential during postseason, and not just him but someone like Keith McGee?**

COACH WEIR: Double question. I like all those guys. I like Vance. I like Makuach. I like Keith. Those are three sophomores that are exceptionally talented. I've tried to tell all of them -- not just Vance, Keith or Makuach -- that these guys they're trying to catch -- the Justin Jameses, the Deshon Taylors, the Martin brothers; I can go on and on with the great players. They're fourth- and fifth-year players. They just are.

And these are tremendously talented sophomores that I think are going to matriculate into being those kinds of names and players. But that process to get there is ugly sometimes. It's not pretty. It's not every night is going to be sexy. There's some ugly nights along the way.

And these great players I just mentioned, they had ugly nights along the way too. We just have to endure those, learn from them and grow from them, and just allow their careers to kind of grow from there.

**Q. You were talking about the ugliness. How do you keep your team from feeling all the negative comments that people are saying, just so they can stay positive and keep going?**

COACH WEIR: Honestly, I think if anybody contributed to the negativity, particularly early in the season, it was probably myself. I didn't do a good job of handling probably how our non-conference season was unfolding, and I perpetuated a lot of that, particularly internally.

And as I've reflected back on that, I don't think I handled that the right way. And all I've really tried to do since is just be as positive and enthusiastic about them and their opportunities as I can, drown a lot of that other stuff out, because -- I don't know if I necessarily let it get to me, but is I was actually creating some of that energy.

And really over the last month or two, come win, come loss, whatever, it's just been about trying to grow and keep these guys in a really good state of mind. And I think the style of play today lends itself to that as well --

more of an aggressive, enthusiastic, energetic style of play as opposed to kind of a playing-not-to-win, let's-prevent-losing kind of attitude that I don't know if we necessarily took on but I know that was maybe permeating around, even just the periphery of our program.

**Q. Looking forward to tomorrow, you did a lot of things well against Utah State this season even though you lost both games. What are you looking forward to do differently if anything tomorrow night?**

COACH WEIR: Unfortunately, I haven't spent one second thinking about that. Utah State is an amazing basketball team. I could go on and on about what I think about them, their team, their program. They play basketball the way I love to watch.

They're great. We're going to have to kind of work on that between now and tomorrow and give ourselves the best chance to win.

**Q. You're talking about your mental state. Do you feel pretty good about where your team is right now mentally going forward?**

COACH WEIR: You know, I think I said before we came out here, I don't go into-- we've beaten everybody in the league that you would probably need to beat or be in the game or whatever. So I don't come to this tournament -- I don't think we come to this tournament -- thinking anyone here is just distinctly better than us.

I think they're more consistent than us. I think they're more mature than us. I think there's teams with a lot of other maybe profiles that we don't necessarily embody, but I don't know if any of us really in that locker room feel as though there's anyone in this tournament that's just flat out better than we are.

We control kind of our own destiny in that way. So provided we can kind of do what we need to do, then we'll have a chance to win games. But I don't think any of us have really walked away from a lot of games going, man, that team is just, they were better than us in this game. We walk back and said, geez, we turned the ball over this amount of times or we didn't go to the offensive glass or we missed a lot of layups or missed a lot of 3s.

And that's a good feeling to have, as weird as it sounds. Our season might have gone great overall, but I think overall as a unit we still feel like we can win games. So this, obviously, is a nice one for us.

And hopefully our team, again, was challenged today mentally in a lot of ways. We'll be able to grow from it and give Utah State a good shot tomorrow.

**Q. Not to be overshadowed by Vance's outstanding play in the second half, can you talk about the huge winning plays that Vlad and Drue had in the second half?**

COACH WEIR: I told all the guys yesterday everyone was going to play. So get ready. We're all going into this and we're all going to play. You need to be ready because we're going to play fast and we're going to trap and we're going to need more bodies out there. That's the only way we're going to be able to potentially win games and games in multiple days. We can't wear guys down.

So it really became -- is still now -- a very team-oriented philosophy. And we need contributions from everybody. And even down to whoever you want to go down to, Vlad, you can name a lot of different guys, everyone's contribution is important.

Vlad has -- I think we've all been aware that Vlad has been a guy that's gotten picked on at times here and there. But he still, defense points per possession, is one of the top three guys on our team. We know we want him out there defensively. He's smart. He talks. He rebounds. And he's very valuable for us there.

I thought in addition to the defense that he helped he had some great inside/out passes. We were able to play through him. He was able to pass out for some really good shots. I thought that was critical. Drue is probably the only point guard/point guard we have on our roster. So we need that as well. We need a guy that can pass, that can distribute and manage the game a little bit.

The issue is defensively, unfortunately at times he gets caught on some bigger guys or fouls, but he has a role for us as well. So everybody all the way up and down the line has a role. They're all going to have to play them and obviously play them well tomorrow.

**Q. I know you said you like the pace of the play even in the first half. Be that as it may be, as ugly as it was, at times you dug yourselves into a hole. Could you talk maybe about some of the younger guys on the team experiencing that now to hopefully limit the possibility of having something like that happen against a Utah State, having this be their first experience instead of that?**

COACH WEIR: Part of it you can control. Part of it you can't. We shot 27 percent. And I would say part of that might have been some shot selection, might have been some nervous, might have been some things we can control. But some of it wasn't. Some of it was a missed layup. Some of it was stepping out of bounds. Some of it was in the flow of the games we made

mistakes. I think if anything we took from today, I hope, because that was my only lesson I talked about after the game, and probably the only one I'm going to talk about tonight, is just the mental approach.

And I didn't think -- today, I think as you could see by the beginning of the game, I thought our physical -- I thought our physical output was good. It was our mental state that we just looked a little anxious. We looked a little on edge. We were a little jumpy. We were a little emotional. We were just kind of out of it a little bit, which is understandable with basically, gosh, 60, 70 percent of these guys have never been here before. So it's a new feeling for them. And hopefully that's what we're going to learn from this game more than anything, is just having a better mental approach and just being more stable through the course of the game tomorrow night.