

# Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday March 8, 2018

## Paul Weir

## Joe Furstinger

## Antino Jackson

## New Mexico Lobos

New Mexico - 85, Wyoming - 75

PAUL WEIR: I thought Wyoming really fought all game. I don't think the margin between us is very big. We're two very close teams. I thought as great as Joe played, Herndon played well. They just wouldn't go away.

But fortunately we were able to get enough stops. And that is something we haven't done a great job of particularly lately. But we were able to get stops down the stretch and keep them at bay and thankfully come out with a victory.

**Q. Looked like a physical and mental and spiritual denial of not letting them take the game from you. Accurate?**

JOE FURSTINGER: Yeah, just didn't want this to be my last college game. Me and coach we've been close, Antino, we just didn't want it to be our last game together.

**Q. It seemed like there at the end, especially, you were kind of trying to rally the troops as much as you could in the huddle and on the floor. What was your message to your teammates there?**

ANTINO JACKSON: Like coach says all the time, he tells us to be poised. We've been in the situation a few times this year. I was just telling the guys to be poised and pull out the ballgame.

**Q. James and Dalton, they're leading scorers, but you kept them at bay tonight. Anything in particular that you were able to do to hold them in check?**

ANTINO JACKSON: The past few days we've been watching a lot of film on them, Coach has done a really good job of preparing us to make them do what they're uncomfortable doing. And we were able to do that tonight.

**Q. You guys got stops when you needed stops. There's been close games where maybe you didn't.**



**I don't know if maybe shots didn't fall. Was it a conscious effort? Was anything different in this game to get stops as it got close down the end?**

JOE FURSTINGER: I feel like throughout the year we've improved on, like, late-game situations and today it helped us.

**Q. The last time you played Wyoming Herndon was not in there much because he was sick. Tonight did you feel like he kind of added something on defense with being at full strength?**

ANTINO JACKSON: He's a really good player, and I've got to give credit to him. Him and Joe was battling tonight. Them kind of playing another game, he was more tired, they were more tired. And we were able to make him beat us and not let the other guys beat us.

**Q. As one of the veteran players on this team, what does it mean to play a large role in helping New Mexico get back to a semifinal?**

JOE FURSTINGER: It means a lot. Coach Weir believes in me, which I love. We play as a team. Everyone believes in each other. We've got to help us again.

**Q. In that vein, what's it feel like to win a game in this tournament and not be one and done?**

JOE FURSTINGER: It feels great. Feels amazing.

**Q. It seemed like you were able to frustrate Wyoming there. There were some things they were throwing that weren't called as technicals. Is that something you were trying to do is get under their skin and get them off their game?**

ANTINO JACKSON: Everybody knows we're runners. So Coach just told us, we were exchanging buckets. This is the game we want to play. They get frustrated and worn down at the end, so we were able to do that.

**Q. How much time do you give yourself to celebrate before you mentally start preparing for tomorrow?**

JOE FURSTINGER: We're already on to Utah State.

ANTINO JACKSON: Zero.

JOE FURSTINGER: None.

**Q. How does it feel to be able to show such great emotion in a game that you had such a huge part of in a win or go home?**

JOE FURSTINGER: I play this game with so much passion, I take everything so seriously. When we lose games I'm mad at myself. It just feels really good to win.

**Q. How badly do you want it, Joe? How badly do you want it, Antino?**

ANTINO JACKSON: Like you said, this is my senior year. I don't want it to end. I'm not doing this just for me; I'm doing it for a coach that believes in us and for a team that's just together. Like everybody said, we got picked last and we're here and we're not satisfied.

**Q. Sorry if this is repetitive. This is your first win in this tournament and I know the people back in Albuquerque, everyone likes to call this Pit West, but this is the first time it's been what it once was. You never experienced Pit West. What did these guys tell you that this used to be like?**

JOE FURSTINGER: I still talk to Alex Kirk, Cam, Hugh, and they said it was crazy when it was one and done here, and just how we fill up the Thomas and Mack Arena, all our fans.

**Q. You said in order to win this tournament it is going to take the best defensive effort by New Mexico. How do you feel you're at defensively right now is?**

PAUL WEIR: I thought it was pretty good. It's as good as it's been in a while. We did a lot of time on how to guard Justin James. We did an excellent job on him. We guarded him with three people and that was the idea. And we did a really good job containing him.

I thought our defense down the stretch in the second half, whether we missed a free throw or we couldn't execute something offensively, we were going back and getting stops defensively. Which was really big for us.

At the beginning of the second half I think we gave up three offensive rebounds in the first four possessions, that wasn't great. That's going to be an issue for us with our size. But if we can find a way to get stops, man, it gives us some balance, which we desperately need.

**Q. You got off to the big quick start. What do you tell the guys to keep them from panicking? Is it sometimes bad to get off to a good start like that?**

PAUL WEIR: I'll be honest with you, the last month or so as the gravity of our games increased, I tried to take my foot off and be more relaxed and calm with them. And the message before the game was: This is just the next game. I don't care it's in Vegas or care what

it's for. We have to stay relaxed and play our game. The bigger the game, the bigger the moment, the more we have to run, press, and be us. And I think as long as we can do that, we alleviate some of that other stuff that can creep in.

I think our style of play lends itself a little bit to that. We just get to go out to run and press and trap and play, and we don't have to think a ton about other stuff.

Fortunately it got us off to a good start, which I think was big for us tonight. It seemed like we were playing defense the rest of the way, but I'd rather be doing that than being down after a start.

**Q. You were talking about your identity, you run press, all the defensive identity stuff. Your identity on offense is three-pointers. Is there something to be said that you found a way to win with the point guard play being what it is lately and your identity on offense? You didn't do what your identity is tonight. You still found a way.**

PAUL WEIR: Yeah, I thought they did a good job of really getting out on us, and I think that was why we were picking up fouls. They were so out on Antino. We were kind of picking up fouls in the drive. We had a lot of stuff around the rim. Joe was terrific tonight. Not only getting the ball one-on-one in the post but getting stuff off the glass.

But I think it opened up everything else. Their defense was terrific taking away our three-point shooting. That's the most we've gotten on the free throw line in a while. We were good.

Overall if you told me we were going to do what we did at the free throw line, we were going to get 13 offensive rebounds, that's a traditional offensive game. It's a little unusual for us, but maybe because they were taking away all those 3s, it allowed us to be more basic.

**Q. I thought the composure down the stretch was very good. I thought they were patient. I thought one of the biggest plays, Joe seemed like he was caught in the post and hit Dane for a reverse layup, which was a momentum stopper. Talk about the composure and the patience down the stretch and how you saw it.**

PAUL WEIR: Yeah, I think there's two things that go into that moment. I think there's a physical component. I think you have to be, like, in shape to be, like, mentally aware to execute what you're going to do. And then there's the mental side of it as far as okay, here's the gravity of the moment, the depth of what's going on. What do I need to do? How do I need to do it? Not the score or the time or whatever it may be.

And I felt all year long like we were physically ready for these moments. We're not tired, ready to go. The most minutes anybody played tonight was 31. Physically I think we're ready to go. It was just the mental side of it.

I thought we got in really good stretch there through some of the games. The Boise game was a letdown for us. It probably made us really go back and think about coaching the mind, teaching the mind, putting us in a great space in those places. And we've been able to close out games ever since.

I think because we have both of those things I feel really good. There's never a guarantee. Someone makes a great shot, misses an easy shot, sometimes those things happen. But right now we have a good blend of physical and mental acuity in those moments.

**Q. You mentioned it with the 13 offensive rebounds, overall how do you feel about how your team rebounded tonight?**

PAUL WEIR: I thought it was great outside of those three offensive rebounds in the first four possessions of the second half really bothered me. They don't think they're running tomorrow, but they are, for the rebounds. That's something that's a big key for us. We can't let teams hurt us on the glass. Because they have an advantage there. We don't have a lot of size.

Offensively for Joe and Sam and Troy and those guys to get in there and create second shots, particularly early in the game, it gave us a nice momentum, a nice flow. Even when shots weren't falling we were able to keep scoring and feeling good about ourselves.

**Q. Can you comment on the ball movement tonight by your Lobos.**

PAUL WEIR: Pretty good. I think, again, we learned from that Boise game. Even watching the game before us tonight I thought the last few minutes of the game, it got really stagnant. There were two teams in the moment, not really wanting to go out and win. We had that when we lost to Boise at home. I keep talking about the gravity, but the seriousness of the moment can get to you.

But I thought tonight was awesome. My favorite play of the game was them scoring, us getting the ball out, throwing it down the other end and Makuach laying the ball in. That's a commitment to our style, not getting worried, just keep playing. Who cares the score, who cares the time, and keep going. And that's what we have to do, even more so as the games go forward. This will be Utah State's third game in three days. We have to crank it up even more; even more pressure, even more running, even more 3s. That's why we've always done what we've done, for these moments.

**Q. Can you talk about the importance of Troy's play lately, because he's been very good the last five games.**

PAUL WEIR: He has been. You know, he's always been a very good defensive player, particularly off the ball. He's a great steal guy. He's one of the top steal guys in the country. He's great for our press off the ball. He's always been a very good offensive rebounder. What's kind of come and gone with him has been his 3-point shooting. For him to step up and make 3s lately has been enormous for us. Because everyone has been keying in on the usual suspects. His ability, because he's going to get open looks, to make 3s, really helps us offensively.

**Q. Joe said there's no time to celebrate, on to Utah State. Taking a look at Utah State, what do you see?**

PAUL WEIR: I haven't spent any time on them. We did a scouting report really quickly in the locker room right as the game ended. We'll go back and get into them tonight.

Off the top of my head, like I told them, McEwen and Merrill, McEwen really hurt us in game 1, Merrill really hurt us in game 2. We have to contain those guys. We spent a lot of time working on James.

I think going into game 2 we spent a lot of time working on McEwen. I thought we did a good job on him. We have to go in and put the best game plan we can in for tomorrow night. And for me that starts now. Obviously there's been other coaches working on it, and the players, they're already into it. But now it's time for me to dig into it, too, and hopefully by tomorrow at 8:30 we'll be locked and loaded.

**Q. You're going to make them run tomorrow?**

PAUL WEIR: Yeah, I am.

**Q. That's not my question. So you've talked all year, you haven't really tried to put specific goals on this team, and you haven't tried to promise anything to people, but the one thing you've consistently said is, We want to be ready for March and we want to build this team for three days, three games and three days in March. Did you feel pressure to get this one out of the way?**

PAUL WEIR: Quite honestly, I didn't feel any pressure. I haven't felt any pressure for the last month. Every time Snake comes around to practice, he keeps telling me we're playing with house money. I don't know how appropriate that is to say with gambling rules.

We have no pressure, that's the beautiful part of it, we were 3-8. Part of the reason I said let's worry for three

games in March, because you can't really say much else in the middle of November when things aren't going well. And really, that's what we talked about through that, is this season was going to be a war of attrition.

I think college basketball seasons are way too long. That's a whole other subject. But I thought by March if we stuck together and we did what we needed to do, other teams would decrease enough we could catch them. I don't think we can beat a lot of of these teams that we beat lately, I don't think we could have beat them in November; San Diego State, UNLV. But my March, the seasons are long enough that those teams maybe can chip away a little bit and have chinks in their armor. And if we can keep grinding away and getting better and getting more together and believing in our style, maybe we could get to a point where we could catch those guys.

And that's really the only choice we had, and now we're here. And hopefully we can execute. There's no guarantees but I felt it gave us our greatest probability of success.