

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday March 10, 2018

Paul Weir

Joe Furstinger

Antino Jackson

New Mexico Lobos

San Diego State - 82, New Mexico - 75

PAUL WEIR: Obviously I thought San Diego State did a tremendous job. I think we played a pretty good game. But I think to win tonight we would have had to play a great game. And unfortunately, particularly I think offensively there in the middle, the end there of the second half, San Diego State did a great job defensively and we didn't take the greatest amount of shots or the shots that sometimes go down don't. And we just couldn't get in a groove and they went on a great run there. Kell was terrific.

And you have to tip your cap to San Diego State. It's a great team. They deserve to win the championship and they did. Unfortunately for me and for us, that means the end of an amazing run with a tremendous group of young men that I'll never forget. I wish I could give them a different ending because they worked so hard and they gave so much and you always -- like your kids, you want to reward them for things like that. Unfortunately I couldn't reward them tonight. And you have to give San Diego State credit for that.

Q. You guys did have that lead about the 8-minute mark down. Were you in the huddle? Was it more of a Boise State feel when you guys weren't able to close, or were you poised like you had been the last 7-game winning streak?

ANTINO JACKSON: It was about 6 minutes not 8.

I don't think we thought about Boise State in the championship game. They were fortunate enough to make a couple of shots and get on a run, and we didn't make shots.

Q. The memory of the season, you have talked about it with senior night being recently and stuff like that. What are you going to take away from this week, not as much the whole season, but this week, what are you going to take away?

ANTINO JACKSON: Well, first and foremost, as Paul Weir is the head coach, at the end of the game I'll be a



different type of person. I just felt like tonight I just fought. And there were times in practice where we go through stages like that, I just feel like all of us just kept fighting. I won't forget this the rest of my life, just trying hard to the very end and not giving up.

JOE FURSTINGER: I just love my coach so much. He's given me everything. I'm very thankful for him now.

Q. Obviously down the stretch Trey Kell starts hitting free throws and starts kind of taking over at the end. Do you feel you did a great job with Trey up until the final six minutes or so?

JOE FURSTINGER: He just made a few plays, and we lost the game.

ANTINO JACKSON: I give credit to him. He's a good player. He did a really good job in the middle pick and roll. He was just fortunate enough to make a couple shots. We tried hard on defense.

Like Coach said, you have to tip your hat to him.

Q. Down the stretch they had both Pope and Jalen McDaniels on the bench. Had Kam Rooks and Max Montana, two guys who for long stretches in the season didn't even play in games. Were you shocked by that? Did you notice that? And how did you think that might affect the game?

ANTINO JACKSON: Honestly, I didn't notice that at all. And I don't think that affected the game.

Q. I don't know if the final decision, Paul, you kind of mentioned maybe this was over before the game, sounded liked maybe there was still a possibility for postseason. If there is a possibility I'll ask, is it official that there is no postseason?

PAUL WEIR: I don't know yet, to be honest with you.

Q. If there is any possibility that there is postseason play beyond this in any tournament, would you guys want to go play in a tournament that possibly is a pay-for-play kind of tournament?

JOE FURSTINGER: I'll leave that up to Coach.

ANTINO JACKSON: No comment.

Q. I'll go ahead and continue where I asked them: Would you want to continue with this group of guys or is this more of a fitting end for what you guys went through?

PAUL WEIR: I wish it was a single question. There's a lot that goes into it; financially, logistically, arenas. There's a lot of different layers to it, and I haven't spent any time going through that. I know we have facility issues back home. I know there's financial considerations for different things. And I don't know, I'd have to go through those with Eddie and see what he thinks, and see if it even fits with all those other things. It's not really just the heat-of-the-moment kind of emotional thing right now.

Q. I know you're proud of your kids, press were raving about the execution of your team. But the Aztecs, you've played TCU, Arizona, Nevada, you played big-time tournament teams. How dangerous do you think San Diego State is moving on into the big dance?

PAUL WEIR: When I went to Mountain West Conference Media Days and I saw those guys walking around for the first time I thought to myself, This is an impressive-looking team. And I think the way their season started they showed tremendous potential. They had a couple of bad losses early. I think they had one to Cal, I think one to Washington State. If you eliminate a couple of those, they're better than Nevada. They are good.

I think they have the best center in the league. I think they have the best point guard in the league. And Trey Kell obviously think he could be the best two guard in the league. They have a tremendous group of players. They have great length and size. And Coach Dutcher, the way he managed his team and got through things, whatever they were going through to get to this point and playing at this time, you have to give him a lot of credit.

I said in the handshake he's coach of the year as far as I'm concerned, the way he managed this season and get his team playing well and get all those kids bought in. Their body language I think has changed drastically to what it was earlier, and you can see a different vibe about them.

We gave it our best shot. I would have loved to play the perfect game, because it would have taken that to probably get them. But capable, very, very capable basketball team.

Q. I want to ask you the same thing I asked the players about not having Pope or McDaniels out there late. You've probably watched tons of film on them, how surprised were you? You've been a

rookie head coach before, he's a rookie head coach in the biggest game of his career as a head coach. How much, for lack of a better term, balls does it take to make that move in that situation?

PAUL WEIR: You know, I thought Montana being in the game was actually a really slick move. It really allowed them to spread the floor in the ball screen coverage, we couldn't pack anybody in because they were doing a really good job of spreading the floor. Putting Kell on the ball screen and then they kicked out and Montana made the big three on the corner on the end one, as well. I think the Montana one was great.

Pope, to be totally honest with you, when he's not on the floor I'm happy as can be. He is such an impressive, physical specimen. Rooks was terrific, and played a great game. But to me, just watching Pope move around, I think he's the best center in the league. What some other people see, they must know a lot more than I do. I just think he's a very influential player on both ends of the floor.

So any minute he was out I felt was potentially beneficial. But at the same time Rooks was terrific. Dutcher is terrific, and their team did everything they needed to do to win.

Q. You just said so many great things about San Diego State and all their great players. What does it say about your team that you guys were six minutes away, you were right there with them basically the entire time. Talk a little bit about the heart and will and desire of your team.

PAUL WEIR: Yeah, it was pretty special. I told the guys in the locker room, I have a two-year-old, I don't know if that makes me a good dad or I a bad dad, but I get proud of my two-year-old. I'm just watching my two-year-old and interacting. I was proud of these guys. And I don't really have that emotion very often, not even just today, just the last six weeks or so they've made a lot of people believe. And I think in the process they even made themselves believe. And to do that in today's day and age is really hard.

I think even Dutcher will probably attest to how hard it was for him to get to this point. But to get a group of young men 19 to 22 years old to kind of form as a unit is a challenge. And it was amazing to kind of watch them do that. And I think there's power in that, and I think that's what allowed us to shrink the gaps between us and all these tremendous teams like San Diego State.

I'm happy for them that those things work and still matter and got to this point. I would have loved the feeling for them to obviously get it. But San Diego State was just too strong.

Q. I'm not sure if there's one play, obviously, that you can pinpoint or that there was, but to feed off the question about Montana, the three-pointer was big. He had a blocked shot and for a moment, your players almost looked briefly deflated. Was there ever a point in the waning moments that you have to remind them we're still in it? Did you notice any body language?

PAUL WEIR: No, we talked throughout the whole game. The last time we played them we finished the game on a 13-2 run. Let's keep going. Let's keep going. Eventually we'll be able to punch back in this thing.

I thought there were a couple of critical plays. Kell's deep three was a dagger. He made it over Joe from about 25 feet. I thought that was a big shot. Thought whether it was a charge call or not at center court on Watson, I thought that was a big play, because it could have gone from a charge at center court to him making a floater in the lane. And it seemed like all those kind of critical plays it could have gone one way or the other, whether it's a deep three or charge or whatever.

We had a couple of layups rim in and out. That just kind of happens in those games. Fortunately those plays went our way a lot this year. But tonight, to San Diego State's credit, they went their way.

Q. Going back to the question about you had an end-season turnaround. Can you comment on the way their character grew as young men, not just basketball players throughout the season?

PAUL WEIR: Yeah, incredible. And I learned a lot, myself, as a coach this year. You talk a lot about culture and the culture you want to instill in a program. And when I got here there was a culture I wanted to put in place. And there was a lot of things we had to do differently. And it's easy to do that in April through November when there's no games, there's no adversity, everyone is all in. They'll put on the "believe or leave" shirt, they'll do all that stuff April through November. But when you're 2 and 8 and 3 and 8, that shows a lot of resolve. And our culture was really challenged at that point. And fortunately we were able to work through it.

It was a bumpy road. There was unfortunately a lot of guys that had to go through some things to get where we wanted them, but really thankful they did, and they ended up getting to reap those rewards.

Q. At the eight-minute mark they had gone in a bit of a scoring slump, Makuach at 7:39 hit the bucket and you have a 7-point lead. I'd asked the guys at that point when you guys were in the huddles, and

you've referenced the Boise State game a lot and how things changed from that moment on and how you guys were in timeouts down the stretch, was tonight more of a Boise State timeout?

PAUL WEIR: I don't think so, because the Boise State was 28 seconds. The Boise State was really like a snapshot right at the end of the game with six or seven minutes to go that we're not even talking like that. We're just trying to keep the game going. Like I said, the last time we played them we finished on a 13-2 run. We kept saying, this is where we want it, this is hopefully where the game is going to continue to go. There was nothing that like that that came into my mind.

Q. Because you didn't have that 13-2 run, and you didn't close like you had done lately. Are you surprised that you weren't able to close out, that they did have the energy that you guys hoped they wouldn't? And do you have any regrets about sprinting on the day of the championship game, the day of the semifinal game, any regrets?

PAUL WEIR: No, I think you have to give Trey Kell credit. He made a 25-foot shot that was big and Montana made the and-one in the corner. They made some big plays, and unfortunately we just had a couple that so far this year in those games have gone down. The open looks, the layup around the rim, the charge at center court, those are kinds of things that if they go the other way we're not having that conversation. And those probably two or three plays in the stretch turn into a six-point run. Unfortunately in a game like this there's not a big swing. The game was going to be so tight anyways, when you give up a swing like that it's hard to come back from.