

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 9, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

San Diego State Aztecs

Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Matt Bradley

Lamont Butler

Postgame Press Conference

San Diego State 63, Colorado State 61

THE MODERATOR: We've got San Diego State with Coach Brian Dutcher. We have student-athletes Lamont Butler and Matt Bradley. Again, Coach will make an opening remark and then we'll direct questions to the student-athletes. Coach, go ahead.

BRIAN DUTCHER: The parity in this league is incredible. Whether you are in last place or first place, the distance between the teams is paper thin.

Niko Medved and his staff do a great job. Stevens and Tonje are really hard to guard. They have good smart players around them, and this is a hard-fought win, and we knew it would be. We knew it would be a hard game.

I told the guys after that whether we ran the plays we called efficiently or not, we made plays when the game was on the line. That's what good players do, and that's what good teams do.

So whether it was out of the play or the play after the play, I thought we made enough important ones to give ourselves a victory today. So I'm grateful for that and the opportunity to play again tomorrow.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Matt, talk about the free-throws. You looked like you were talking to yourself a lot during those free-throws. What was going through your mind?

MATT BRADLEY: Yeah, I just had to give myself motivation. Stepping up to the line, obviously, you can't live by the past. You have to live by the present and the



future, and it's March.

I knew I needed to step up in that moment. I was reciting to myself, speaking to myself, giving myself confidence, praying even. Yeah, it was a really big moment for me, and I'm glad I made them.

Q. I mean, you guys obviously knew Stevens was going to be a hard cover today. How much was it more about making the points hard rather than, you know, focusing on what his output actually was? What was the plan coming in against him?

LAMONT BUTLER: The plan was really to just try to deny him the ball, make every catch hard, and then on every shot try to contest, make every shot hard.

He is a great player. He is leading them. He led them all year. Great player. Hard to do, but it was more of a team effort, honestly. It wasn't just me or Adam. It was a team effort, and we got it done.

Q. Matt, question for you. With the conference tourney you're going to be face a lot of these teams three times, for a third time this season. Can you tell us about the difficulty of facing a team three times in a season in terms of just familiarity with one another?

MATT BRADLEY: It's hard to beat a team three times. Colorado State at their house went into overtime. Our house was a little easier, but this game was really challenging, and it came down to the wire.

So, you know, I think either Nevada or San Jose State, those are both great teams tomorrow. Either/or, it's going to be a tough game. We just have to be ready to play. But, yeah, the difficulty level is really high.

Q. Matt, just to elaborate on the free-throws, have you been waiting for this moment since basically last year to get up there? And I know you've done a lot of work. Just talk us through that.

MATT BRADLEY: Yeah, Coach Dutch, last year he mentioned to me, like, Matt -- he mentioned to me the



player he had some years back at Michigan and told me that he missed some big free-throws, and he made it up when he had the opportunity.

Although I didn't make it up last season after Boise, whatever game, I came back and I was able to make it up today. You know, there's still work to be done. So just to be able to make that going into March Madness and this tournament is really big for our team and myself.

So I appreciate my team trusting me, putting me in the game in those moments, and I was able to knock those free-throws down, so it was really big for me.

Q. 8-0 early lead for Colorado to start the game, and that was the largest lead of the entire game. What would you guys attribute to the relatively slower start today?

LAMONT BUTLER: I feel like they made some good plays at the start of the game. Tonje was getting downhill a lot. He actually started off like -- he started the game off with 11 points, so he just had a great start. We eased our way back and got the win.

MATT BRADLEY: Yeah, they caught fire. I think the good thing we didn't do -- that we did do is that we didn't get rattled. They got 8-0. We just slowed down. We kind of sped up in the beginning I think with the energy in the building, our fans being there. You know, it was crazy. And once we slowed down the tempo and started playing our game, we got back in there. Yeah, I think that's what had to do with it.

Q. Lamont, you came out of the gates aggressive offensively. I think you missed your first four or five shots, but then you got two lefty layups, one-and-one. What did you see on those plays, and how did that get you going?

LAMONT BUTLER: I missed a couple of shots early, and I knew I had to get to the rim. Just doing that it got my game going from there, and Coach has been harping on that just since the start of the year. Just get to the rim. You're going to find it from there.

Got to the free-throw line. Got my rhythm and just able to make plays, hit shots, and get the win.

Q. Lamont, recently the media named you the Defensive Player of the Year for the conference, and Mensah the coaches' DPOY. Is there a friendly rivalry between the two of you?

LAMONT BUTLER: No, it's all love. It's all love.

We're both top-level defenders, and us on the team together it's just hard for other teams. So we keep it together. We both DPOYs this year in my eyes.

BRIAN DUTCHER: When Stevens drove down and got that layup, I didn't think either one of them could play defense at the end.

THE MODERATOR: That will do for the student-athletes. We'll take questions for Coach.

Q. While that's fresh in your mind, Coach, you called time-outs 16 seconds left. Were you going to try to foul? I'm assuming the play wasn't let Stevens go down the floor and have an uncontested layup?

BRIAN DUTCHER: No. If it was, I shouldn't be coaching, but that's what happened.

No, I didn't think we could foul with 16 seconds. I just know how fast he is getting down the floor, that it was going to happen so fast. It wasn't like they were going to come down, take a lot of team, and it got under 10, and we could foul. So we tried to play straight.

I wanted to send him to the inbounder to try to at least put two on him, and then Lamont -- obviously we try to force the ball to the middle instead of you up the sideline, but Nate wasn't there to support, and they didn't play very well together on that.

The two defensive players of the year made a mistake in a critical time, and he got a layup, but he is a magnificent player, and that happens. So the thing is to not get over-frustrated where I'm obsessed with that play because there's plenty of plays left to be made. We made the play at the end in order to get the stop and win the game.

Q. These games, I mean, you have won 16 straight of these quarterfinals, but a lot of them have been really close just like this. The UNLV game, that went to overtime a few years ago, and Jamaal had to hit a buzzer-beater. The Wyoming game. What is it about this format that makes these games close? Is it because the other team has already played in and knows the building and is feeling good about itself? What is it about these games?

BRIAN DUTCHER: This is a really good conference and a lot of good teams. If you just look at close wins of a couple of those turned and we're not conference champs outright, and we're not playing the next day. You have to make a play or two.

And the curse of coaching is I don't remember any of those wins. I only remember the losses. So that's the curse of being a coach, but this was two really good teams. We knew this was going to be a good game. We talked about how good it was going to be. That Colorado State is very good. They play hard. They play the right way. They're connected.

That's a credit to Niko and his staff to have the challenging losses they had and to continue to bring it every day, play as hard as they can and as well as they can together. That's a credit to their coaching staff.

And we were fortunate to win. We all know that. Stevens had a shot to tie and then they had a rebound, and we were able to get a stop to prevent it from going to overtime. It's hard to win a college basketball game, and we're grateful to be playing tomorrow.

Q. At halftime when you guys came out, it looked like you and Niko were laughing at each other, and you met at half court. What was said in that moment when its a 27-25 half?

BRIAN DUTCHER: We basically say the amount of control either head coach is going to have over the game is small. I say this all the time.

It's not to dismiss coaching, but March is for players. We've done enough coaching during the year. We know who we are. We know what we should be doing. Then a player or two is going to make a play in March that either advances you or sends you home.

In a backwards way we were both agreeing that March is for players, and players make timely plays. Even though we both have impacts on the game, the players decide who plays on.

Q. You were a Nathan Mensah block away from overtime. Can you talk about that?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, Nate has been -- I told Nate after the game, I like the job he did because he sat so much. He got in foul trouble and then he didn't play great in the second half, but when we're trying to get stops with the game on the line, he is going to be on the floor.

So I told both he and Matt when they came in really late in the game after sitting, I said, you both have to come in and play at the pace of the game. At this time there's no easing in. Even though it's in the second half late, you have to play at the pace the game is being played at. I thought they both did a good job of that down the stretch.

Q. Regarding Nate, Nate had four points. Obviously with foul trouble. Darrion didn't score, and so he struggled since he had that huge second half at New Mexico. Do you need both those guys to really get going if you are going to do something in the NCAA tournament, or are you so deep that you can survive without them?

BRIAN DUTCHER: No, I mean, I told the guys after the game. If it wasn't your night tonight, don't worry about it. Don't get frustrated because tomorrow is another game, and it might be your night.

If you are frustrated, it can't be. So put your frustration behind and your individual performance, embrace the victory, and then get yourself motivated to play tomorrow because if you remain frustrated, you won't play tomorrow either.

My job as a coach is to get them out of that frustration, get them reengaged and tell them they could have a magical day the next day.

Q. After the 8-0 start Jaedon LeDee came in the game, and he seemed to kickstart the offense. Can you talk about how important his play was in that first half?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, I had to do the TV interview at the 12:00 mark, and I said, if you are a fan of offense, this is the greatest game in the world. We pride ourselves on defense.

Then the game slowed down to a snail's pace. It was played fast, but it was hard to score baskets after that from that point. At the 12:00 mark both teams were headed to 100. Then the game kind of settled in, and both teams guarded hard. I was proud how hard we guarded more than anything after that 12:00 time-out.

Q. I know you obviously don't know who you are going to play yet, but if you were to see Nevada tomorrow night, what would stand out about that potential matchup?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Just how great they played us at their place. I mean, everybody that was supposed to be important for them scored in that game. Blackshear had a great game. Lucas had a great game. Baker had a great game, and then Coleman had a couple of two three-threes. They played at a high level to beat us that game. So I'm expecting more of the same if we were to play them.

Same with San Jose. San Jose is interesting because we only played them one time, so this will be a second time. Obviously, it was at our place. That's probably why we got

the win. We didn't have to go to San Jose. So that will be an interesting matchup if that happens.

THE MODERATOR: That will do it, Coach, thank you for your time.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Thanks, everybody.

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