

# Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 14, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

**San Diego State Aztecs**

**Coach Brian Dutcher**

**Jaedon LeDee**

**Darrion Trammell**

Postgame Press Conference



**Q. Jaedon, take me through that last play and what's going through your mind especially also with the free-throws given the way they've been falling for you all day?**

JAEDON LeDEE: Just staying the course. With free-throws it says I went 11 for 18, so I knew I was going to make more than I miss.

Just that play we hadn't ran in a minute so, my teammates had ultimate confidence in me. Coach had ultimate confidence in me. I just got to my spot and tried to shoot a shot I shot a million times.

**Q. What goes through your mind when Dedan gets that shot off and the relief that you had when it didn't go in?**

DARRION TRAMMELL: We're excited. It's March, so wins are going to be ugly, but it's all that matters that we get the win and now we get to focus on the next game.

**Q. You had that buzzer beater shot at halftime. What are the emotions going into the locker room? Did that bring any kind of momentum swing?**

JAEDON LeDEE: Finally. I couldn't buy a basket. I missed a lot of layups. As a team we missed a lot of layups. I missed a lot of shots.

That was just great momentum. We talked about it going into half. We were kind of down, and we talked about as a team. That was something positive. We just highlighted that, and we went out in the second half with great energy. I mean, it showed.

**Q. Darrion, your game has propelled lately in the last couple of weeks. You had five assists again today, five steals. What has worked for you so well?**

DARRION TRAMMELL: I'm just being myself and having confidence in it. Coach has put me in the right spots to be successful, whether that's offensively or defensively. Putting me in ball screens. Me and Jaedon working the pick and roll and being more active and recognizing that, I

San Diego State 74, UNLV 71

THE MODERATOR: We have student-athletes Darrion Trammell, Jaedon LeDee. Coach, let's start with you with thoughts on today's game?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Just another night in the Mountain West. Every game is like this. Every one.

It's not a surprise that this one went down to the wire. Kevin has done an incredible job with this year's UNLV team. They are really good. The key to the game was rebounding.

We took a major step forward on that when the Boone brother didn't play because he is a sensational rebounder. When I look at the stats at the end of the day we outrebounded them 50-31. We had 25 offensive rebounds. That was the key to the game. That was the key we put up in the locker room, and I thought that was the key to the game.

Both teams played good defense. Two sensational performances. One by Dedan Thomas and one by Jaedon LeDee. Sometimes coaching is easy. I ran the last play, give it to your best player and let him make a player, and that's what Jaedon did at the elbow sweep.

Made a big basket at the end. We found a way to hang on for a victory. So proud of our guys. Proud that we're playing in another semifinal game in the Mountain West Tournament.

THE MODERATOR: Let's take questions for the student-athletes.



mean, it's March. I've got to leave it out on the floor every game.

**Q. Jaedon, what needs to change offensively to start the game?**

JAEDON LeDEE: I didn't think we did too bad starting the game. We put emphasis on it. We got to start a little faster. Just maybe having our blood and body going and just getting ready to go.

But, I mean, I like how we finished, so that's all that mattered today.

**Q. Jaedon, Utah State coming up in the semifinal. Great Osobor is going to be the physical force from Utah State, at least main focus-wise. What would be your game plan offensively going into this?**

JAEDON LeDEE: I don't know. We have to go over it as a team. We haven't made it back to the hotel, so I don't know yet.

**Q. Jaedon, just following up on that, obviously you and Great Osobor had two really big matchups in the regular season. Obviously he was announced player of the year. Are you looking forward to that matchup going up against him again?**

JAEDON LeDEE: It's going to be a good game. I know they'll try to game plan for me, game plan for the whole team, but yeah, we're going to come with it tomorrow.

**Q. Jaedon, you got fouled 17 times tonight. How much of an emphasis did you have on getting to the free-throw line, taking fouls, and how big was it that you got to get them in foul trouble late?**

JAEDON LeDEE: It was good. I mean, I feel like I probably -- I get fouled probably every time I touch the ball, but those 17 times they called it. I'm just glad we capitalized on the free-throws and capitalized on the opportunity when we get fouled.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes at this time. Thank you, men. Questions for Coach.

**Q. What makes Dedan so special?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: He just plays with great pace. I mean, there's coaching where you can get a guy better, and there's just a kid that plays with great instincts. Whether it was his dad teaching him as he came up, he just has great instincts. He plays with pace. He knows when to go fast and when he goes slow, he hits the runner. He hasn't even

tapped into the three-point shot, which he can make.

When he starts shooting that with confidence behind ball screens, I mean, he was unstoppable tonight, and we doubled him, we switched on him, switched sides on him, and he just got to his spot, and he missed two shots at the end.

I don't know if we kept him from making them, but he missed a couple of shots that he made all game, and we were fortunate that happened.

**Q. I know one or two plays don't define this game, but you guys are down eight, two seconds left to go in the first half. They're trying to get a double-digit lead. How big was that, get a steal, make a three, and going into the locker room with energy and something positive?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I think we were 1 for 9 from three in the first half, and that was the only make from three. It was nice to see one go in. I heard the coaches joking with the team that we finally got the lid off the basket.

I mean, we shot 28% or something like that the first half again. That's what we shot last time we played here, but we made 11 threes. We couldn't get a three to go in with any regularity today, but that was a huge momentum-changer.

We scored a basket, and then we scored the last basket of the half, so we went on a little 5-0 run to end the half. We tried to get our team uplifted by that. They seemed a little down at halftime, but we tried to say, come on, that's such a huge momentum change.

We tried to get them fired up a little bit more. It came from the coaches, to be honest with you, some of that. We tried to get their energy up that that was such an important shot and that can turn the tide of a game, and maybe it did.

**Q. I'm sure you knew that this game was going to turn out something like this. Just what do you tell your team going in to deal with a team that's trying to get their get-back from a couple of weeks ago?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Rebound was the key. When the other Boone didn't play, that was a huge momentum change. He tried to warm up, but he is their offensive rebounder. He is the rebounding problem.

They had a short man bench, and they had to play different line-ups and different combinations. I thought Kevin did a great job of not having a main cog in his offense, his best rebounder, in my opinion, for the whole game. I thought he

did a great job managing his team and overcoming that and having a chance to beat us on his home floor.

That's hats off to UNLV missing a really important player, and it's hats off for us for finding a way to finally get a close win. We've lost so many close games. We finally got a close win, and it's a good time to do it heading into this tournament and heading into the NCAA Tournament.

**Q. Micah had a rough game out there offensively. 0 for 8 from the field. Despite that, at one point he was a + 21 point differential. What are the ways he helps a team win despite not flooring?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: He guards at a high level, rebounds. I felt bad for Micah. He missed two free-throws. We were up two at the end of the game and he missed them both. I just said to be a really good basketball player you have to have a short memory.

Anything that happened today, it's in the rearview mirror. Come out and make every shot you take next game, and shoot like you think you're going to. It's important for a coach to give his team confidence even when it doesn't seem like they deserve any.

But Reese and Micah are going to make shots tomorrow. I'm convinced of it. They're too good of players and shooters, and I think the ocean will open up tomorrow, and it will look like the size of the ocean, the rim. We're making shots tomorrow.

**Q. You guys have a lot more playoff experience than Utah State. You've been to the semifinals 19 times compared to their five. How are you going to use that playoff experience going into a game against the 1 seed?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: It's not really Utah State. It's Osobor and Brown who have played in the NCAA Tournament two years in a row. They've been to the conference championship of their league. There's Utah State playoff experience, and there's the playoff experience their players have.

They've got guys that have played in important games in March, and I think they'll be ready for their opportunity and so will we.

**Q. Can you take me through what you told the team after Dedan Thomas hit that spin move layup at the end of regulation to tie the game?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Just what every coach would tell his team, we got this. We're going to win the game. Be

positive. Don't let that distract you. Come out with great energy, and let's win the game.

Every coach in the country is going to give a pep talk. You're not going to sit there and go, wow, we made a mistake doing this or we screwed this up. You're just going to turn to a positive energy. That's all you can do because if you have negative energy you're never going to win. We had to believe we were going to win and sell that to the kids, and they had to believe it or we had no chance to win.

**Q. Dutch, you called timeout with 2.7 seconds left. I'm assuming you were going to foul, and you didn't get it done.**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, I just told them 2.7, we have to be real careful because with that amount of time they're probably going to catch two a shot. We were real cautious about fouling at that point. If there's 8 seconds they had to dribble up the floor and we would have fouled for sure. At 2.7 I didn't want to have a guy catching a balance into a shot and we grabbed him.

So we want to put two guys on Dedan, and that worked out really well. He got a wide-open shot to end the game. Coaching sometimes is overrated. We had a guy in front of him and behind him, and I looked up and both guys were behind him. We were fortunate he missed the shot.

We were guarding the right guy, but we didn't do what we needed to do to prevent a shot by him.

**Q. Coming back to win this after losing so many of these types of games all season, what does it do for your team?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I just told them, this is a good time to start this. Its March. It's tournament time. This is a good time to start winning close games. Everything in the past is in the past. All we control is the future.

Now we've got one. We've won a close game. Let's go get another one and another one and let's keep this going.

**Q. UNLV went to a zone late in the game similar to Boise on Friday. Even though you guys missed some shots in the beginning of it, it looked like there were good shots. Were you happy with the offense against the zone?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, I thought they played good against the zone. There was a set play I was trying to run late that we didn't get into, and I kind of talked to Lamont and Darrion that they have to be the voice on the floor and get us into the set.

But it's a set we got a layup on. A double ball screen where we get downhill, and I tried to run it again, and good things happened when we ran that play. We didn't get into it, and it ended up Lamont hit a tough jump shot. That was the only thing I was mad about that we didn't get into a play I wanted to run late.

**Q. Mentioning meeting Utah State in the playoffs. It's happened four times in the last five or six years. Fifth time in the last six years. What's it like playing Utah State so many times in the Mountain West tournament, especially three or four different coaches in that time as well you've faced with Utah State?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I don't remember one game other than Sam Merrill banging a three on us to win it. That's the thing I remember. That's the curse of coaching. You always remember the ones you lose.

I remember that shot and what an epic game that was. Well, against our 30-2 team.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

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## UNLV Rebels

### Coach Kevin Kruger

### Keylan Boone

### Dedan Thomas

#### Postgame Press Conference

THE MODERATOR: We have student-athletes Dedan Thomas, Keylan Boone, and Coach Kevin Kruger. Coach, let's start with you, some thoughts on tonight's game?

KEVIN KRUGER: Another great college basketball game. Another great fight. Just two teams I thought playing like -- playing their hearts out and competing and doing whatever they could to help their team win games.

Yeah, I mean, I thought guys did a great job competing for 45 minutes. Just came up a little short.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. Either one of the players. It's hard to obviously come into a game understanding that extra possessions are going to be kind of what tells the story. San Diego State almost gets 20 more field goal attempts than you guys, but you still are able to take it to overtime and make it a game. Kind of what is that indicative of in terms of just the spirit and the heart that's in that locker room?**

KEYLAN BOONE: They're a hard-playing team, but so are we. Coaches kept saying keep playing hard and keep figuring it out and as players over time we learn to adjust and keep finding ways to battle.

Kudos to them for keeping plays alive, but kudos to us for still playing. That's just kind of our DNA. We just keep playing. We keep figuring it out as the season. We just kept figuring out games. That's the show for us tonight.

DEDAN THOMAS JR: Coaches did a good job of instilling that in us and just making that a part of our identity, so that's a big shout-out to them, yeah.



**Q. Keylan, tough play at the end of the first half. Had that inbound play that went for three the other way. Can you take me through what happened on that play?**

KEYLAN BOONE: A bone-headed play by me. It wasn't really any real great shot we could have got, especially with our backs turned towards me and away from the rim. I was just trying to force a play that wasn't there. It was just get the ball in, and we finished the half off like that, but yeah.

**Q. DJ, I see some tears in your eyes. Can you just tell me about what you're feeling right now and how much this program means to you?**

DEDAN THOMAS JR: We have a lot of seniors on this team, so I really just -- we really wanted to win this game for them and just keep going farther in the conference tournament, but some shots didn't fall at the end. It's just my passion for the game.

**Q. Keylan, how much of a factor was your brother not in this game as far as rebounding?**

KEYLAN BOONE: It was huge. At the end of the day we asked him could he go? That wasn't the case. As we look towards our full team, we just have to pick up for him. At the end of the day we have a lot of good players who can get production, and Coach was going down the line.

Shane gave us great minutes, and he was huge today. Karl was huge today. We asked a lot of Rob. It was next-man mentality. That's all we can do.

**Q. Dedan, can you take me through the shot you hit at the end of regulation? Micah Parrish misses those two free-throws, down two. What was your mindset going down the court?**

DEDAN THOMAS JR: Coach told me to go get a bucket, so I -- Keylan set a great screen to get that switch on me. I felt like I had a great mismatch on me, and I felt like I had a great chance of getting the basket. Yeah, just get a bucket.



KEYLAN BOONE: Just let him play after that. Get him the ball, get a screen for him, and let him rock. He's going to make the right read. He always does.

**Q. DJ, just some overall reflections. You start off the season as a young freshman, go through the season, and it culminates in you having a monster game in the final game of the season and being a big-time part of this program. Just overall feelings of what do you think about that?**

DEDAN THOMAS JR: It's a great feeling. I had great coaches, great teammates, great staff, just great people around me just always instilling confidence and just putting their trust in me to always make the right play.

Coach Kruger, he just pull the ball in my hands. He trusted me to make the right play with the ball. As I got more games under my belt, I just kept getting more confident, more comfortable. That's just all my teammates and coaches. They kept trusting me and giving me confidence.

**Q. DJ, guys that score 29 points in a big game like that usually don't stick around very long in college. Are you 100% committed to coming back here next year, or are you undecided?**

DEDAN THOMAS JR: No, I'm definitely coming back next year, yeah.

**Q. For both of you guys, the NIT, do you guys want to keep playing? Are you excited about maybe extending your season?**

KEYLAN BOONE: Of course. As a senior, I just want to keep playing with my guys. Over time you build a ten months to a year relationship with these guys, and it goes bigger than basketball. I just want to be able to keep being around the teammates, keep being around the coaches, because it's more than just basketball. But us being able to play more games is a blessing, so I'm not going to turn down it.

DEDAN THOMAS JR: Oh, I mean, more games to just get more wins and just keep having fun playing basketball.

If we're asked to play in the postseason, we're going to prepare for it and walk into it with a winning mindset.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to release the student-athletes at this time. Thank you, men. Questions for Coach.

**Q. You have seen them develop all year and seen his**

**best, but can you describe his game today and what he is able to do for you guys? Dedan.**

KEVIN KRUGER: Yeah, just another great game for him. Shouldered a lot of the burden this year, which was something in discussions all the way through recruitment about what it was going to be like. A lot of opportunities, a lot of expectations, and a lot of opportunity for growth.

I think we just have seen him get better every single game out. He's -- again, for somebody who should still be in high school, he's far ahead of where most guys his age are, and he's got a lot of exciting and good basketball still ahead of him.

**Q. Kalib Boone tried to go. Explain the pregame process and what you saw in his first stint and what happened there and then the impact it had on rebounding and throughout the game?**

KEVIN KRUGER: Kalib tried. He wanted to play. He was excited about every day from Saturday. He was excited about the progress that was being made so there was some optimism there.

At the same time if you are going to go against San Diego State, especially as a big guy, being hobbled and not trusting it, it's just not really a game you can go into like that. He wanted to give it a try. He warmed it up, but he just didn't quite have that trust level in it, so at the end of the day it was a tough decision for him.

He wanted to play, but watching him it was kind of an easy decision as a coach because you certainly don't want him to hurt it worse or struggle or do anything to it that could delay the possibility of getting back.

**Q. As I asked Keylan, at the end of the first half you took the time-out and tried to set up a play. It ends with a three-pointer for San Diego State. What were you trying to get there? What do you think Keylan saw? Just how did that unfold?**

KEVIN KRUGER: I'm not going to speak for Keylan. I think you asked him, right? Yeah, we had a little -- that's not -- obviously we weren't throwing to Trammell, but Keylan answered it.

**Q. If you had to describe this season from start to where you are at right now, how would you describe the ups, the downs, and kind of a wild season?**

KEVIN KRUGER: Probably just like that. The ups and downs, but at the same time finishing with momentum, a lot of positivity, a lot of great support. Yeah, these guys dealt



with a lot, especially early on. Still trying to figure each other out a little bit, but as I told them in the locker room, a lot to be proud of, a lot to -- they're going to look back and remember a lot of great things, a lot of great games, a lot of great days together.

Unfortunately, just a little too inconsistent there, especially at the beginning the front half of the season because I still feel this is a really good team that if we had another month, we would continue to go and continue playing and keep getting better.

**Q. San Diego State has won 17 straight quarterfinal games in the Mountain West Tournament. Can you just speak to how hard that is? Most of them have been close games like this.**

KEVIN KRUGER: No, I guess. We haven't won 17 straight, so I would be guessing. Yeah, it's a testament to their program just how consistent they are. I mean, they're the same team it feels like every time you play them. They're incredibly tough, incredibly selfless. They do a lot of really good things for each other to make each other play better and have success.

Tonight was also another great example. We did a lot of really good things, and then, of course, they did a lot of really good things too. A great game, but unfortunately, we just were a little short. Yeah, they're just a really good program, and they've had a lot of success over the past couple of decades.

**Q. Two questions real quick. First, in overtime when Shane Nowell got his pocket picked, what exactly happened there? It looked like he was looking over to the bench or the official, and then they dock the ball away from him?**

KEVIN KRUGER: Yeah, that all happened really fast. I'm going to have to go back and watch it. I couldn't say anything. I would be guessing right now, and I don't want to be in the wrong or speaking on an assumption of my memory that would end up being wrong.

Yeah, it was a very weird play. I took my eyes off for a second, so I would be piecing things together. Yeah, we just have to -- it's a great situation, it's a great situation, a great example where we just have to be strong, finish out possessions.

But Shane made a lot of great plays tonight, and he gave some great minutes. He brought a level of physicality that was needed.

At the same time, yeah, we have to finish out those plays.

**Q. A little tougher right now to get in the NIT than it has been in the says past with the committee now making those decision, 32 strict teams. What would you say to the committee right now why UNLV should be one of the teams to get into the NIT?**

KEVIN KRUGER: Oh, I think we finished fourth in this conference. I think we're trying to send six or however many as a conference. We're pushing for that, and we finished right in the middle of it. We had some great wins. We've gotten better, clearly gotten better since January 1 or even before the Christmas break. I think there's a lot of reason to invite us.

I think it's a team deserving of the postseason, deserving of the NIT for sure.

**Q. Two questions if possible. You kind of already talked about it I believe in two separate occasions with that turnover at the end of the first half, but I believe two or three times in the second half as well turnovers happened after time-outs directly. I know you haven't watched the film yet, but just thinking back if you can, kind of what went wrong in terms of execution on a lot of those after time-out plays?**

KEVIN KRUGER: I would have to go back and watch specifically, but San Diego State is not a top-10 defense by accident. A lot of this stuff you run against them doesn't work. They're an elite defense.

That being said, guys did a great job I thought of keeping their aggression and staying determined throughout the entirety of the 45 minutes, about making plays for each other, getting downhill.

Yeah, I would need to go back to get more specific on the specific ATOs.

**Q. Obviously we've talked about Kalib obviously missing today's game. I guess my question is about the slightly shifted game plan from San Diego State. Not having Kalib on the floor, the decision to double Rob and kind of blitz DJ kind of early in that game, I'm just wondering kind much you believe that shifted their game plan with KB not playing?**

KEVIN KRUGER: Of course, KB had a really productive and impactful game against San Diego State last week, but it's the middle of March. There's injuries across the board. There's guys that are beat up.

As Keylan alluded to, we have great minutes really from everybody that went in. Truly it had a good feel in the

couple of days of prep. It had a good feel in the locker room, in the huddles of guys really having eye contact, staying locked in because yeah, when you have a guy that started every game but one this season and has played as many minutes as he has, there's going to be a shift. You can't go five on five right now at this point, so it's not like we could have got a lot of live reps out there in the last couple of days.

Guys just did a really good job of trying to fill gaps and, again, going into overtime with San Diego State is nothing to be ashamed of.

It's going to hurt, of course, but there's a lot of reasons these guys should have their chins up and their chests out.

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