

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Final - Creighton vs San Diego State

Sunday, March 26, 2023

Louisville, Kentucky, USA

KFC Yum! Center

San Diego State Aztecs
Coach Brian Dutcher
Lamont Butler
Darrion Trammell
Aguek Arop

Elite 8 Postgame Media Conference

San Diego State-57, Creighton-56

BRIAN DUTCHER: First of all, congratulations to Coach McDermott and Creighton. They've got a really good team, and we were separated by one point tonight. If there was time on the clock, who knows what could have happened.

But we're grateful to be advancing. I told the team in the locker room -- they had the music going. I walked in, and I told them, turn it down. I said, either sing, dance, or get out of the way. Aztecs are going to the Final Four.

Here we are. We're making the next step, and it's something we've always talked about, and I'm sure there were people that doubted we could do it, but we never doubted for a minute. Not to say it's easy to get there or that we would ever get there, but we're there now, and we're going to go and try to win the thing.

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. Darrion, when you are standing at the free-throw line kind of knowing what is at stake, can you just sort of walk us through what you're thinking when you get there and then after the first one missed?

DARRION TRAMMELL: Just having the utmost confidence in myself. I feel like I've shot probably 1,000 free throws in the last week. So at the end of the day, I feel like I put in the work to be able to step up and have the



confidence that I was going to make them.

Q. Coach, before the game we saw you talking to Coach McDermott and embracing before the game started. Talk to us about what it's like to coach against a friend like that.

BRIAN DUTCHER: It's always hard when you go against a friend because, as much as I celebrate winning, if you don't feel empathy for a friend, you're not a true friend. So I'm grateful to win, but I felt bad for Greg and his team because they're a Final Four team also.

But with the one-and-done situation, the volatility of this tournament, we were fortunate enough to go, and I feel bad for a really good Creighton team.

Q. Darrion, I wonder how much pressure you felt on the foul, whether you expected it to be called and whether it had any impact in your shot?

DARRION TRAMMELL: I wouldn't say so. I feel like I still had a good look. The refs made their call. They called it, and I got an opportunity to knock down free throws to win the game for my team.

Q. For Darrion, two questions. Number one, were you surprised that they called that foul in that part of the game? I mean, you've been in a lot of close games this year, and they've swallowed their whistles in a lot of good games.

DARRION TRAMMELL: I wouldn't say I was surprised. I think I got fouled, but it was up to the refs to decide. Even if they didn't call it, we were going to lace them up and get ready for an overtime.

Q. After you missed the first one and you are getting ready to shoot the second one, you take a deep breath and exhale, which you don't normally do, I don't think. What were you thinking at that point?

DARRION TRAMMELL: That the moment wasn't too big for me. Through everything I've been through, I feel like the opportunity was just set there for me. It was God's



timing. I just had to believe in that.

Just having that confidence that, yeah, I missed the first one, but I definitely wasn't going to miss the second one.

Q. Of each of your players that came in, you know, they were in for more than ten minutes. Just how much confidence does that give you at this stage of the season that you are able to have those guys come in and you can turn it to just about anybody on your bench as you are heading into the Final Four?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, this is truly riding the guys that are playing the best. It's the end of the game. Guys that have played the best for the majority of those 40 minutes are in at the end, and that's what we had. Then obviously we have offensive/defensive substitutions at times, but I've talked about the depth being our greatest strength.

Depth isn't a strength unless they embrace it, and this team embraces it.

Q. For Arop and Coach Dutcher. The two baskets that you made late to put your team ahead, what was behind that? Were you just feeling like if you had the ball and had the chance that you were going to take it, or was it called, or what? For Coach, just how your thinking went into that sequence?

AGUEK AROP: That's where we had the advantage today, was at the four spot ducking in with Darrion or Demar coming off ball screens. When I got in, I just -- I mean, I've done that 1,000 times throughout the season, so it was just another shot.

Obviously, there's a lot more weight to it, but I wasn't thinking like that. I was just thinking staying in rhythm and getting that shot up. Yeah, just putting my team up front.

BRIAN DUTCHER: This is from a young guy that wasn't going to play basketball two years ago. Was going to give it up because of injuries. To come back and play on this stage and make the baskets to ascend us to a Final Four is a great story.

Q. Coach, so in the first half Nathan Mensah was kind of having a little trouble guarding Kalkbrenner, but then in the second half he came out and had one of the best defensive halves that he has had in this tournament. What do you have to say to his defense against one of the better centers in this tournament right now?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I mean, when you are playing a really good center like Kalkbrenner, he is going to score some

baskets, and you just try to make it as hard as you can on him. So I thought Nate, as a two-time Defensive Player of the Year, made it hard.

Those shots could have easily gone in. They didn't, and that's the difference between advancing and not advancing.

Q. Briefly, building off that for Coach or Arop, any adjustments specifically to account for Kalkbrenner in the second half?

BRIAN DUTCHER: We just didn't want to show him angles. We played behind him a lot. Because he is so big, if he show him an angle, he drop-steps. I thought at least he had to score over a body. You know, we didn't give him the angles to throw over the top or drop-step. We stayed behind him with an arm up and just try to made him score over the top of us. He is capable of doing that, but we were fortunate that he missed a few.

Q. Then for Lamont. You guys shoot 38% from the field. You're 8 for 11. What was working for you?

LAMONT BUTLER: I was getting to the -- just getting to my in the mid-range. I was knocking those down. Shots I hit all year, shots I worked on. I had some open looks from three that I took, and I was fortunate to make it. I'm just glad they went in.

Q. Question for Dutch. Creighton scored a season low 23 points in that second half. Where did that 20 minutes rank for you guys this season in terms of performance on the defensive side?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Obviously with what was at stake, it was incredible. And just Darrion, Lamont, the constant ball pressure they put on, that even a ball screen that usually leads to baskets, everything had to be earned tonight.

And they made some important plays, but there was nothing for free tonight. Everything was hard to get for both teams. It was hard for us to score, but, you know, it was just a war of attrition, and we came out on top.

Q. Aguek, what does it mean to get this regional title against your hometown team?

AGUEK AROP: I mean, it's special. I grew up watching Creighton go to tournament and play and just being a fan of Creighton. Obviously they're a really good team, and so being able to -- at least my final year -- after losing last year and being able to come back this year and play against them and beat them, it's special, you know.

I'm from Omaha, but I don't (laughing) -- I don't feel that bad for Omaha. This is for San Diego. The people that are with me, all the people from south Omaha, all my family, all my close people, they were supporting me, they were behind me. That's all that mattered.

Q. Brian, on the replay when the game actually ended, it looked like you had a pen in your hand drawing up a play. I'm just wondering, the guys celebrate, you have to pull them back, and then there's about a two-minute delay. You don't know whose ball it's going to be. I'm just wondering if can you walk through that whole end sequence. It was a little bizarre.

BRIAN DUTCHER: I think I talked for ten minutes. I don't know if anybody heard 30 seconds (laughing): Well, if it's their ball and more than .4, then we have to play straight; and if it's .3, we're going to surround the rim and not let them lob; if it's our ball, we're about to throw deep where we can get it in and touch it; hold on, hold on, who is in the game?

You know, it was controlled madness. You know, I'm glad there was no time left because Creighton -- last team to have the ball would have had a chance to win.

Q. For Coach as well as the student-athletes, this is the first time that San Diego State has ever made it to the Final Four, and it's the first time that the Mountain West has ever been represented. Just what does it mean to be sitting in history right now?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, it's a vision Coach Fisher had all those years ago when he came to the Mesa, and we recruited and told people this is what we were going to do. They all thought it was just recruiting talk, but here we sit.

So thank you for Coach Fisher for building a great foundation for our university, for supporting us and for these young guys for believing in that vision and making it come true.

AGUEK AROP: I think we picked up where all the guys that came before us left off. Going back to Brandon Heath and Malcolm Thomas, Billy White, even recently Jordan Schakel, Matt Mitchell, KJ Feagin, all those guys. We're just blessed to be able to pick up where they left off and just to really represent them and the city of San Diego.

Q. Dutch, they were 2 of 17 on threes. This is the fourth straight game in this tournament where teams have not even come close to their season averages. How much of that is scheme and close-outs and high hands, and how much is your physicality and just sapping the legs out of them, and shooting is so much

legs that even when they get an open look, they don't have the legs?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Like I said, it was tough to score today. Both teams were tired. It's been a lot of basketball been played, and just we ended up winning the game on the inside, throwing it down low and trying to get towards the basket. And they tried to do the same thing. Kalkbrenner had a couple of looks obviously, and they tried to get downhill too.

This late in the season on tired legs neither team shot the ball particularly well, but we made enough plays and were tough-minded. You know, we're a defensive-first team. Everybody knows that about us, and our defense carries us.

Q. If I could ask the players, not Darrion, about what Darrion means to this team. This is two games in a row in the last two days that the ball was in his hands at the critical moments.

LAMONT BUTLER: Darrion is a big-time player for our team. You guys seen the scoring outbreaks he had the last couple of games, but it's really the defensive side, the pressure he puts on the point guards. And we love him. We need him, and we needed him tonight. We just are glad to have him on our team.

AGUEK AROP: Yeah, just to add on, Darrion is a special player. We've been with him all year, and we've seen him do what he did these past two games 100 times over the practices and even games.

To see him break out, it's no surprise to us, but it does make us happier to see him scoring and really leading us because, man, this man puts in the work. He came from Seattle, overlooked, and for him to step up and do what he did for us is special. We all love him for that. Even if he didn't do it, we still love him. He knows that.

Q. Brian, kind of a two-part question. Given the way the game ended, did you expect that the officials would swallow their whistle at the end? And, second part, what do you think about Coach McDermott biting his tongue and not complaining about the officiating?

BRIAN DUTCHER: It's hard. That's what we all do is have some grace in losing even though we may not agree with the call. You can't do anything about it. So he is a class act. So I'm sure deep down he felt they should have had an opportunity. It didn't happen.

You have to remember, I was at Michigan in 1989 where people questioned whether Rumeal Robinson was fouled,



and he made two free-throws, and we won a national title.
So this is not the first time fouls have been called at the
end of NCAA Tournament games.

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