

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: San Diego State vs UConn

Monday, April 3, 2023

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

San Diego State Aztecs
Coach Brian Dutcher
Adam Seiko
Matt Bradley
Nathan Mensah
Aguek Arop

Finals Postgame Media Conference

UConn - 76, San Diego State - 59

COACH DUTCHER: I'd like to congratulate Dan Hurley and the Huskies, very deserving. Played an elite level the entire tournament.

We battled. Battled back to five in the second half, but gave them too much separation. We had to be at our best. We weren't at our best. A lot had to do with UConn.

I'm proud of our guys. These guys have given me everything they had. Six years, five years, five years, five years. This is what all these guys are all about. It's about college athletics. They're good people, and they're good students, and they're really good players. We can feel good about the things we did.

And we are. We feel good about the things we did. Disappointed in the loss, but there was a brotherhood in that locker room that will never be divided by a margin of victory or not winning at all. That brotherhood will last a lifetime. I told them that.

I was in there with Juwan Howard, and we were sad many years ago too when I was an assistant coach and he played with us, and he was in here supporting us because that's the kind of brotherhood we all have and will continue to have, and I'm proud of these guys.

Q. Matt, I know it's still fresh, but what do you think



you'll remember the most about this season?

MATT BRADLEY: I think the season was a great comeback story as far as bouncing back from the 30-2 season, the year after when San Diego State lost in the first round. When I joined the team, lost in the first round. We did so much this season.

And it's just a great comeback story. I'm so lucky to be part of the team where I was able to set the precedent for what this team has to come when it comes to postseason play, and moving forward, we've got a taste of it.

And everybody's like -- I can see it in everybody's faces returning, they want it again. And we're sad. But ultimately we just gotta keep our head high and just realize we got a great comeback story this season.

Q. What does it feel to be part of a brotherhood, end the season off with your guys?

ADAM SEIKO: This season has been unbelievable. These guys next to me, those seniors we have, it's just been a blessing to be around this group of guys. Not just on the court, but they're even better people off the court. And all these guys have a chip on their shoulders. Coaches, they recruit people who -- maybe guys not the highest touted, but guys who want to win.

We're winners every day. We practice like winners every day. I couldn't thank God for this moment being in the national championship. It doesn't feel like we're in the national championship, but we're just winning games. We just love winning. Shout out to the coaches and fans and players who play their hearts out every game and every single day. I love these guys.

MATT BRADLEY: When I entered the portal and came here, you know, during that time with COVID and stuff, I was really ready to just stop playing.

I told myself -- I was just like, you know what, man? It's been tough. Just go home and get a job and call it a day, you'll be all right.



But Coach Dutch, he's one of the most genuine guys I've ever met, the way he took me in and the brotherhood and real leadership that we could follow, changed the trajectory of my life for sure.

It's more than just basketball. I'm crying up here and stuff, but I'm thankful for Coach Dutch and everybody that played a part in my move here going to San Diego State.

NATHAN MENSAH: You get a taste of this brotherhood. It goes farther than winning basketball games. I feel like myself, AG, the older guys, we kind of like went through a traditional our freshman year struggling, sophomore year with success, and junior year we tipped it off with just what we can achieve. And the transfer guys, Darrion, Matt, and all those guys, they came in with some sense of urgency that they wanted to win for those who have missed out on this opportunity.

So you see the selflessness that everyone on this team possess. That's one thing I will say I'll miss the most about this team that we have here.

AGUEK AROP: I mean, it's so much more than basketball with these guys. I mean, there's a lot of days where I know several of us come in and we don't want to be there, but I think it takes like one guy to be smiling, and the next thing you know, I'm back in it. Something that small.

But it goes a long ways. Some days I come in, I think I have the worst practice, but I have the best practice ever because Matt and Nate and Adam, Darrion, Lamont, someone was able to pick me up by doing something as simple as saying "Let's go" with a smile.

It's hard to put it in words, but that example is how deep this brotherhood runs. And I think we've each gone through our own trials and tribulations.

And there's a sense of, I don't know, suffering, where we understand each other, and I that's why we're really able to put ourselves to the side and put together a special year and a special run. I know we didn't win, but this is something that I dreamed of since I was a kid. It's what we all dreamed of. But coming from humble circumstances to being here, praise God that I get to share with these guys next to me and the guys in the locker room.

Q. Adam and Matt, obviously you cut the lead, the deficit down to five points. What was it about them that made it so hard to close that gap over the course of the game?

ADAM SEIKO: You know, we're a physical team, and one thing they do really well is offensive rebound. They're the

best offensive rebound team in the country. We've been harping on that all week. We did our best to hit them and try and secure rebounds, but then we also got in a little foul trouble earlier in the half. 13-minute mark, they're already in the bonus, which was tough.

So just their ability to offensive rebound, their ability to -- Hawkins hit some timely shots. But they have a really good team. They're well coached.

And we fought back in there. We knew that when we were down it wasn't over with. We've been in that position many times this year. So we cut it down to five. We had a chance to cut it down lower, but they just made a little bit more plays. So it happens. And I couldn't be more blessed to be here and remember this forever.

MATT BRADLEY: I'm not going to lie, they have a lot of weapons. They were pretty good. To beat them, we had to make shots. I shot poorly. And you had to have a really good game to beat those dudes on the offensive end.

But defensively we fought hard. We cut it to five. It wasn't sweet at all. And they got presence down low, shooting from the outside.

A lot of guys stepped up for them. And they make all their free throws. So they're a really good team, well coached, and hats off to them. They battled, and we battled, too. They're a really good team.

Q. You cut it to five. What was so challenging going from there and trying to close that gap against this UConn team?

COACH DUTCHER: They're great offensively. You know, eventually, they made a timely basket or two. We didn't. They're hard to score on. Their length bothered us around the rim.

They had their way with the entire field this tournament. So I just said when we were down at halftime, I said let's cut it to six with 10 to go. Let's get back in there and let's make them play a close game. Let's make the margin where it's uncomfortable.

I think we got it to five with six minutes to go, and then it was seven. And we missed a one and one, and it ballooned up from there.

I like the grit of my team. I like how hard we fight. We don't give in. We came from 14 down the last game. We cut it to five. I think there were people in the stands that thought, hey, they're capable of doing it again, and we were.

But we ran into too good of a team, and we didn't play at our best. Like I said, they're are a reason for that, why we didn't play at our best, but we had to play better in order to have a chance to win the game.

Q. First half missed four straight field goals, 11-minute field goal drought. Did it come down to missing shots or adjusting to the UConn defense?

COACH DUTCHER: We got off to a red-hot start in the game offensively, then AG had a post-up where he missed a jump hook, had a roll to the basket, got it blocked. Had another play, we got to the rim. Those are plays you have to make over their length if you're going to have a chance to win the game.

Their length bothered us at the rim. Jaedon had a tough time finishing. Finally went through the body more in the second half. But they're the hottest team in college basketball. We thought we'd have a chance. We cut it to five, but obviously we didn't have enough offense to overcome as good as they are.

Q. They didn't actually know who was coming out here, which players were going to come out until the very end. Why was it important to have these four gentlemen come with you in this moment?

COACH DUTCHER: Because they were the seniors that used up eligibility. They've given everything to the program. What better group to hear from than guys that have been here for five and six years and poured all into it, and to see the raw emotion and to feel good about college athletics when you hear from kids like this, from young men like this.

I mean, if you can't -- the box score and articles won't read anything about it, and only the people sitting in this room, the dozen or 20 of us will have a feel for what this was tonight, a feel for what it really is. And it will all be words, but you won't feel the emotion that you felt by sitting in here with these young men.

Q. You mentioned after that win on Saturday that you aren't a mid-major team but you come from a mid-major conference. Just talk about what that means for the state of the game that you guys made it here. You gave UConn the toughest test of the tournament, five-point game with five minutes remaining.

COACH DUTCHER: We have a good team. With that being said, Florida Atlantic, we were fortunate to get by them, and they've got a really good team, too, everybody

back.

So the state of basketball is in good shape right now. And you don't have to have millions of dollars in NIL and you don't have to get every kid in the portal to be successful. You just have to have kids that are about the right things that want to win beyond anything else and are willing to sacrifice to do that. And that's what we have.

Q. Your program was the first since Indiana State in 1979 to be the first non-Power 5 team to be in the NCAA championship game. When you think about that, especially with the rumblings around of San Diego State possibly going to the Pac-12, what are your thoughts on this accomplishment, taking this program to the championship game?

COACH DUTCHER: I wish we had Larry Bird. We might have had a chance to win (chuckling). No, it's not just our athletic program. Our university is incredible. Everything about San Diego State is at the highest level you can get to, academically, socially, athletically. Everything we're about is first-class. And so if another conference was interested in us, I would not be surprised.

Now, whether anything happens or not, that's beyond my control. But I think we represent everything good about college athletics and education.

Q. Before this tournament, Florida Atlantic hadn't won a tournament game, hadn't been in the tournament. Obviously you all, your first national championship. Miami in the Final Four for the first time and now UConn wins their fifth championship. What's this all say about the changing state of college basketball and the parity that exists in the sport right now?

COACH DUTCHER: I mean, Florida Atlantic was way better in person than they were on tape. They got everybody back but one guy. I mean, I don't see who is going to beat them next year. They're fantastic.

We have a good team coming back. We're going to be very good next year. I had two freshmen, they're as good as any freshmen I have had in my program, couldn't get on the floor. They're going to contribute next year.

People are going to say why didn't he play last year? Well, we were really good last year. We're going to be good next year. With that being said, you run into the tournament and you look at all the seeds that get through, it's hard to win in March. That's why everyone's so disappointed in our success over the last three years. It's like we lost a one-possession game to Houston. We lost a one-possession game to Creighton and we ran into a hot

Syracuse team.

It's hard to win in March. Those teams are really good, too. But you have to get a little luck and get the right matchups and have to be playing your best. That's what this team did. We've had a lot of good teams at San Diego State and we'll continue to have good teams.

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