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An interview with: Northern Colorado



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with Northern Colorado.

Q. Taylor, you've seen tapes of San Diego State, how do you think you match up with them on the boards?

TAYLOR MONTGOMERY: We provide a lot of good size. We have a lot of guys with a lot of energy and tenacity. So we plan to just box out just like we would any other team and create space because we know they're so athletic and can just jump over us.

But we're used to not being the bigger, more athletic team, so we're used to playing like that. So we do what we do, and we always seem to find a way to get rebounds. I mean, nothing's going change from our end.

Q. Taylor, from what you have seen of Leonard on tape and in person a little bit, how can he change the game and what will you guys have to do to slow him down?

TAYLOR MONTGOMERY: Well, he brings a lot of energy. You know, he's nonstop attacking the boards. You know, he leads their conference in rebounding, I think. And he's always going. Always going. Just nonstop.

So I think to keep him from, you know, being a big, you know, problem, just keep him off the boards and not let him get rid of them and get

rebounds and easy lay-ups. Just make all of his points difficult, I think that will be the best chance.

Q. How much zone defense have you guys played this year and how confident are you in it? Because some teams have had some success against San Diego State because they're kind of streaky shooters.

NEAL KINGMAN: We played a couple different times. It's not our -- it's not what we hang our hat on. We're man-on-man defensive team. But when it comes to tournament time you got to make adjustments just like every other team.

We've played it enough that we're comfortable in it. It's not anything that's foreign to us by any stretch.

Q. Devon, there's been a lot of comparisons with you and Jimmer Fredette. I just want to ask you if you get sick of that or do you welcome that.

DEVON BEITZEL: Whenever you get compared to a player like Jimmer, it's a compliment. But there's, I mean, no one in the country can do what he does. I mean, I've never seen anyone score 52 points in a game and only have one point come from a free throw. That's unbelievable.

I mean, I'll take the comparisons, I'll take the compliments, but, I mean, I'm definitely not at that level.

Q. Devon, have you been able to look back and see what Jimmer did do against San Diego State, and can you take anything from that in terms of how to attack them and maybe how to beat them?

DEVON BEITZEL: Well, I've been working on my one dribble across half three pointer. (Laughter.) But, um, besides that, just stay aggressive and take what they give.

Don't try to force too much, let the game come to you. But, at the same time, make sure

you stay aggressive.

Q. What in particular or in general concerns you about San Diego State? Is it their athleticism, size? What in particular do you feel like has been drilled into your heads or that really you feel like you got to be cautious about or avoid falling into?

NEAL KINGMAN: Transition defense for sure is one.

CHRIS KABA: We can't get into a running game with these guys. I mean, we got to make sure we take care of the ball. And I think the biggest thing has been drilled into us this week is patience offensively.

Q. Also for Devon. Again this is a follow-up on Jimmer. What parts of your game are different for people who haven't seen you? I mean, you've obviously seen him play quite a bit. What part of your game do you think is different from his?

DEVON BEITZEL: I think I do a little more off the ball. I think he gets a lot of his shots with the ball in his hand. I come off screens a little bit more. That's probably the biggest difference.

Q. You guys all had some success against San Diego State a few years ago. How much has that boosted your confidence in terms of, hey, maybe we can do this?

DEVON BEITZEL: I mean, it's big, but so much changes in four years, you know. I think only two of the guys that we really played against are still on the team -- Gay and White. Um, you know, and, I mean, we've become a completely different team ourselves.

I mean, we can't really take too much from that game four years ago. But, you know, we can't -- we can't shy away from them either. We understand they're great team. You are not a great team -- or you can't have a 32-2 record without being a pretty good team. So we just got to make sure that we don't go in their wide eyed and, you know, just play our game.

NEAL KINGMAN: I think a lot of people put more weight on the outside of -- on that outside of our team than we do. People have said you have beat them before and stuff like that. But like he said, we're both completely different rosters. Yeah, it's a familiarity, no doubt, but that's about where it ends.

Q. Devon, your first time, they've been here before, but they can't advance. Do you think that gives you an edge or what's the mentality like?

DEVON BEITZEL: Our mentality's going there with a chip on our shoulder and do whatever we can to win. I mean, we've been undersized and, I mean, we definitely don't have the most athletic team. But we fight every game. And we don't give up. That's kind of what we've hung our hat on all year. There's no reason to change that now.

Q. Chris, you talked about the fact that you can't get in a running game with them. Visually, what can you do with them? And what kind of scenarios do you feel you're prepared for? I mean, I'm looking at, you know, other evaluations of possibly what could happen during the game, and it doesn't look like you can also afford to get down by 10, 12 points against a team with this sort of athleticism.

CHRIS KABA: Well, I mean, like I said, we don't want to get in a running game just because, I mean, their transition game is their best defense. The thing that's lead into that is quick bad shots or turnovers, you know. And then we'll be playing right into their hands.

So I think definitely patience on offense is definitely going to give us pretty much the advantage in some part aspects of the game. If they do get in transition, we got to make sure we get back.

Q. Neil, how patient is your offense and has it been this year? When you have had to be patient, have you guys done a good job? Is it easy when you get the ball to get up and down the court a little bit?

NEAL KINGMAN: We've had some issues with patience this year just because we've got a lot of guys that can shoot the ball well. So if we get someone open on one pass and they're open, they're taking the shot, which isn't a bad thing.

But in a game like this, it's giving up good shots to get great shots. That's what it takes to beat teams with the size and athleticism that San Diego State has. We've been working all week in practice. We know that is one of the foundations of our game plan. And we've done a good job of sticking to our game plan game by game this year,

so that's definitely something that is going to be a key aspect to our success.

Q. Devon, I read that you had some chances to go to Ivy League schools out of high school. I'm just kind of curious why you decided to go to Northern Colorado. What was it about the school or the opportunity that appealed to you?

DEVON BEITZEL: I just didn't have 40 grand a year -- 40 grand a semester to pay for school. You know, that was a big part of it. And then, I mean, it was definitely -- it's definitely been nice to be close to home playing ball. But the biggest one is just, you know, I don't have \$40,000 laying around to pay for school.

Q. On that same line, Devon, when Dartmouth talked to you, did they talk to you about any kind of a work program you could have done or, you know, a lot of Ivy League schools give guys loans or put you in a work-study program to make up for the financing. Did they have any plan at all? Did they say if you showed up at school, we'd put you on the team?

DEVON BEITZEL: We talked about it a little bit, but in the end it just made more sense to me at the time to go to Northern Colorado.

Q. Devon, you know, having been through what you have been to get here, can you sort of put this into perspective for you, how special it is to be in this tournament, you know, given, you know, some of the trials and tribulations along the way?

DEVON BEITZEL: I mean, it's a dream come true, you know. I mean, five years ago we were the absolute worst team in Division I, which isn't something that we really took lightly. It was kind of -- it was just a huge motivational factor for us three up here, Taylor came here the year after that. And, you know, it just shows how our hours in the gym and hours in the weight room and watching film and, you know, just how that has always really just paid off.

THE MODERATOR: Guys, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

We'll have Coach Hill give us a brief opening comment then we'll open it up for questions.

COACH HILL: It's great to be here. It's been a long five years. A lot of hard work. A lot of great kids. And a lot of support from everybody

back in Greeley and the University of Northern Colorado. It's just the ultimate prize for a lot of hard work by a lot of great kids.

Q. I talked to the players about patience in the offense. They said it's been hard for them sometimes because you got a lot of good shooters, when it's open it's hard for them to pass up that shot. How much of a change is it going to be against San Diego State to be even more patient?

COACH HILL: It's going to be tough for them. Because we roll out a lot of confident kids who as a staff we have a lot of confidence in. And the whole thing, and I heard them, so it makes me happy that they're repeating what I've been preaching. That is, it's not a good one, we want to get a great one. It makes me feel good that they understand that and are acknowledging that. Because there's a lot of difference in the game of basketball.

Good shots are often and you can get a bunch of them. But great ones are what we need to have in our offense to have a chance.

Q. Can you talk about Mike Proctor and the role he's played for you guys this year.

COACH HILL: It's been a tough year for Mike. Started off just didn't have the same feel and energy as what he's had in the last couple years. And then the broken thumb set him back. We thought it did. But I tell you what, he did a great job of learning while he was out. He came up, he watched tape, he did a good job.

You could tell he was processing a lot during the games that he wasn't able to play in. He was learning while he was out. He wasn't just sitting there being a spectator. And it really showed when he came back. He was thinking the game more clearly. He wasn't getting in foul trouble like he was early in the year, because I think he had a better understanding and then his confidence took off. And that's what you have seen in the last five games from Mike, is when he plays with confidence, he's really a good player.

In my opinion, when he is confident and believes in himself and bring that's energy he is an all-league type guy.

Q. What concerns you the most about Kawhi Leonard, just watching him on tape?

COACH HILL: That's a long list. He's a

deadly combination of size, athleticism, and motor. You don't really see guys that are 6'7", 225 have his skill set and play with the tenacity that he does for every second that he is out there. I mean, he is what all coaches dream of.

A lot of times you can get little guards at 5'10", 5'11" that play like that. But to find a 6'7" guy with that skill set and that energy is awfully hard to find. And that's why he is the type of player he is and can do the things he does.

Q. Interested in your background in the Kansas Jayhawks, in particular working in Coffeyville. Could you talk about that in particular, Independence as well with Coffeyville. Talk about how that has helped to shape some of your basketball sensibility. Then follow-up, would you mind commenting on what Tad Boyle has come to mean to you as a mentor and a friend and as someone who preceded you in the job that you now hold?

COACH HILL: First part, my time in Kansas has made me the coach I am today. I wouldn't have -- you know, Tad Boyle wouldn't have plucked me out of the junior college ranks if it wouldn't have been for my time in the Jayhawks. I learned a sense of urgency about recruiting, what it takes as an assistant, what you can do to have an impact on a program. And I just learned so much from having the repetitions, so many repetitions going out and recruiting, because you do replace your team every other year.

Then we also have an unbelievable opportunity to see so many Division I guys come in and recruit your guys. And if you are willing and you are open, you can soak up a lot of good information. And I tried to learn from the best. I remember on a two-day time picking up Coach Williams, Coach Self, Coach Alford, and Coach P. Gillen to come, you know, at the huge Coffeyville airport to come in and see one of our guys. And just to be able to have those type of experiences and remember how they did their visits and what they were like and what the kids liked, what the kids didn't like. You know, I tried to soak up as much as I could.

You know, it wasn't the most social scene in the world, but I couldn't replace the experiences I got when I was in Coffeyville and Independence and all those places meant a ton for my growth as a coach.

In terms of Tad, you know, without him, I wouldn't be where I'm at today. You know, I heard it so many times when I was a junior college

assistant, hey, if I ever get a job, I'd love to hire you, to the point where you just quit paying attention to it. He got the opportunity, he followed up and brought me out.

So when you get that opportunity, you just try to do the best job you can. When it's your ultimate goal, you just try to bust your butt as much as you can to help somebody who did you a huge favor. So I can't thank him enough, obviously, the guy behind us, Jay Hinrichs have lot to do with that, too. But without Tad I wouldn't be in this chair?

Q. You mentioned that one of the things you guys have to do is get back in transition. Who were the real transition teams you played this year? And how did you do against them going back on transition?

COACH HILL: Northern Arizona's really good in transition. I thought we did a pretty good job with that. I thought we did a better job in transition when we did half court against Northern Arizona. Portland State is a very good transition team in our league. And Idaho State has a point guard that is, you know, a one-man transition all in himself.

Then obviously the high major squads that we've played in Arizona and Illinois both have really good players that bring it at a rate that we're not use to in the Big Sky.

So, you know, this year overall I've been pleased with our transition defense. One of the stats I look at at half-time in points is transition. We've done a good job of taking away easy baskets. It think that's the good step in any defense. You look at our defensive statistics this year and I think we've led the Big Sky in defensive percentage and that was our goal.

Q. Talk about the recruitment of Devon and what you saw in him that obviously nobody else saw and what was sort of your hope for him? Did you ever expect him to be sort of the player that he?

COACH HILL: You know, Devon's recruitment I didn't have a whole lot to do with. Tad got the job in May, and I came out in June, and when I got there Devon had already been on campus. But it wasn't a marathon of recruiting by any means. Once the offer was made, he snatched it up. And Tad had seen him and liked the way he could shoot the ball. I think maybe the

part that if anything I had to do with was just trying to instill confidence in him when he wavered his red-shirt year, and wasn't sure if he was good enough. I just saw tremendous heart in him. A tremendous will to succeed that a lot of kids don't have. And as a Division I coach, when you can walk through your arena at odd hours and find a kid in there working on the things that you told him he needed to do to be successful, you got to take advantage of that. Even if he might not have the athleticism or the size, guys that have that type of heart make up for it. And you are not going to find a better example than that kid.

Q. Coach, since arriving in Tucson has the energy level been any different with the team?

COACH HILL: The energy level has been great. I'm not sure the focus level was great yesterday. You know, our first practice down here they lacked a little bit of focus, which is understandable. I expected it. I almost anticipated it too, to be honest with you.

But once we brought them back after about 15 minutes into practice, I thought we got a lot out of it. And then it became the Northern Colorado that practices back in Butler-Hancock every day. Which, you know, is to be expected. We're traveling with people we've never traveled with before. Obviously there's so much that's involved with the NCAA tournament. These guys have never had to deal with it before.

Just thought it was my job to refocus them. And they have been. By listening to their answers up here to you guys, I can tell they're exactly where they need to be mentally.

Q. I had a follow-up about Leonard. He has gigantic hands. You probably noticed that.

COACH HILL: Yeah.

Q. What can you tell in the video from his hands? I mean, what kind of advantage does that give him as a basketball player?

COACH HILL: It helps him. He can get a hand on the ball and get rebounds that your average human being can't get without getting too up there. You know, he can use his athleticism and get one hand on a ball and retain it when most guys got to get two. You know, he's so strong. That's a -- then, you know, that's hard enough to defend as it is. But then you -- when a guy like that can get a rebound like that then has the skills to take it himself and start the fast break by himself

that's what makes him so hard to guard. I mean, we don't face anybody like that the Big Sky.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, coach, thank you very much. Good luck tomorrow.

COACH HILL: Thank you.

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