

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Friday March 15, 2019

Brian Dutcher

Devin Watson

Jeremy Hemsley

Jalen McDaniels

San Diego State Aztecs

San Diego State - 65, Nevada - 56

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by San Diego State head coach Brian Dutcher and student-athletes Devin Watson, Jalen McDaniels and Jeremy Hemsley. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH DUTCHER: Well, obviously we were a bit surprised when Caroline wasn't in the lineup. But it's like anything else, it's a wounded animal. We knew they were dangerous anyway. They play hard. The greatest quality in Nevada basketball is their toughness. And they showed it again tonight.

But I've got a tough team, too, and the two best defensive teams in the conference played tonight. It was a low-scoring affair. It was like old-school Aztec basketball. And we got a nice lead in the second half. And then they gave us a good gut punch, came back, and we were able to regroup at the end, have a nice spurt.

Devin did a good job, Jeremy did a good job controlling the pace of the game, and Jalen made some timely baskets down the stretch and we were fortunate to come out with the win today.

Q. When did you guys find out that Caroline -- when did you realize that Caroline wasn't going to play? Was it right at the tip? Was it a little bit before? How did that change your mindset?

JALEN MCDANIELS: I didn't even know until -- I was wondering why he wasn't going in the game. That's when I found out. Other than that, yeah.

COACH DUTCHER: When they came back in for final matchups, there was a different matchup and no one was on Caroline. So I didn't realize until that point that he wasn't dressed. I don't know what happened, but we'll take it.



Q. Devin, you led the team with 20 points. You had that nice little spin-move drive to the basket. Is the back feeling a little bit better?

DEVIN WATSON: Yes, it's feeling a little bit better. I just continue to get my treatments in. I'll be ready for tomorrow.

Q. Jeremy, I saw you kind of laugh after that question. What was funny just about that situation, when it was asked about Caroline?

JEREMY HEMSLEY: No, no. It just caught us off guard. Nothing was really funny about it; I was laughing at something else. Like Coach said, I didn't know Caroline wasn't playing until we got out on the court and I seen he wasn't dressed, in uniform.

Q. Jeremy, you've been talking about how you've been making it public that it's NCAA Tournament or bust. What's it like knowing you're one game away from that? Do you think about that?

JEREMY HEMSLEY: Yeah, of course you think about it. And it's everything we want. All you can ask for is the opportunity. And we have the opportunity to get there. We just gotta play hard for another 40 more minutes. So this is everything we wanted. And now we're in position to do so and it's on us to take care of it.

Q. Jalen, you kind of got into foul trouble towards the end of the second half. What's going through your mind when you're sitting on the bench and just knowing that you can't be out on that floor at that moment?

JALEN MCDANIELS: Just being confident in my teammates knowing they're going to get the job done, and just being -- just being a part of my teammates as much as I can, just keeping their confidence up and just trying to be a great teammate on and off the court.

Q. Devin, the offense really started to sputter there. There was a stretch when they came back. Guys weren't getting great shots or no shots at all. What in your mind changed? What did you change out there? What sets were you guys calling down the stretch that allowed you guys to score?

DEVIN WATSON: I myself was just trying to keep my cool. I knew we were still in the game. It's not like we were down six or seven and the game was getting

away from us. So we were just waiting to see what our coaches was calling, and if the play didn't work, with 10, 11 seconds left we were going to have to make a play.

And I feel like Jeremy made a big play. Bumped him. Made the mid-range. And I had the big 3 in the corner. And, yeah, and the tables turned.

So we knew -- we just played with a lot of confidence. We didn't lose it. We didn't lose control. We were always in control, we felt like.

Q. What is it about this tournament that makes you take it to the next level like you guys seem to do year after year?

JEREMY HEMSLEY: It's win or go home. Me personally, I still feel like I have a lot to show and my teammates still have a lot to show. If we are playing the right basketball around this time you can keep just going, you can keep going further into March.

And so that's what I want to do. And that's what my teammates and coaches want to do. So if that's the task at hand, you have to up your game and you have to play at that elite level if you want to go further in March and play the best teams. So it's sort of a requirement. It's just what you're asked to do and that's what we have to do.

Q. Nevada obviously beat you guys up pretty good in Reno. Was there any sort of revenge factor coming into this game?

DEVIN WATSON: No, it wasn't revenge. I feel like every time we match up with Nevada it's going to be a great game and the fans love it. So, no, we love Nevada. They play hard. And they're a competitive team. We actually like playing them.

Q. What lessons did you learn from that game six days ago when you lost by 28?

JALEN MCDANIELS: We learned just that we've got to play harder, play with more toughness because they're a tough team. And I felt like we capitalized on that this game.

JEREMY HEMSLEY: Just being under control like Dev said. I think if you do that, you always have a chance at winning. And I think we did a good job at that. When we got the lead this time, we stayed under control compared to last game when we had to fight from, like, 15 down or something like that.

So I think if you just come out with that intensity and like I've told you before, just make it to where the opposing team has to match your effort and intensity, then you always have a good chance at winning.

Q. Jalen, could you talk about Jeremy and Devin, their senior leadership and what they bring to the table?

JALEN MCDANIELS: They bring a lot of experience to the table. Down the stretch, they both made big plays that we needed. That's what you expect out of your senior guards. And I mean they're showcasing it every game what they can do. Especially in those situations, they're capitalizing just like yesterday Jeremy hit a 3. So I feel like they're leading the way.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

Q. Who was supposed to guard Caroline and they walked out on the floor and he wasn't there; what did you guys do?

COACH DUTCHER: I think Matt Mitchell celebrated. It was going to be Matt. Matt's had great matchups with him. He played well at our place. Caroline played really well at their place.

Like I say, all we can control is what we can control. So when he wasn't out there, we switched a few matchups up and off we went. And they got in early foul trouble, too. Caleb got in early foul trouble. He missed a lot of the first half.

I thought Cody did a great job keeping him in the game. Porter was good. They're good. They're a tournament team. They're going to be in the NCAA Tournament. And their path is different than ours. They're already in it. They've been in it.

We have one chance to go and that's by winning tomorrow. If we don't win tomorrow our season will be over. We know what's at stake, and there's a controlled desperation to that. Devin, you know, he reminded me of Winston Shepard one year we played at Nevada. They stormed back on us and Winston told the team during a timeout what, did you think it was going to be easy?

Devin basically said the same thing today: They're good. You didn't think they were going to roll over; they're good. We knew it was going to be a game.

It's that kind of comments that come from the players rather than the coaches that make a difference -- when you've got a senior leader that's calm and collected in pressure situations. And that doesn't mean you always make the right play, but if your temperament is right and your attitude is right, you've got a chance to make the right play. And Devin was just a wonderful leader today both on the floor and in the timeouts.

Q. Devin hit those two 3s in the second half. They

called timeout and then it was like a buzzsaw the other way. They just came storming back. How did your team switch it again and was able to hold them, I think, more than seven minutes without a field goal?

COACH DUTCHER: We just hung in there. You know, they stormed back. They're a good team. And so every time we play them it's a back-and-forth affair. There's a lot of toughness that goes on.

They got ahead of us 15 at their place. We cut it back to three or four at halftime. We know both teams are capable of making a run, and it's how you respond to the run that kind of determines how good a team you're going to be. We didn't panic. We kind of hung in there.

No matter what kind of run they were on we kept looking at the scoreboard, it was a two-point game. So it wasn't that they ran out on us by 11 points. They cut back and caught up with us. But we were able to hang in there long enough. And then we made timely plays.

Jalen got in the low post and hit a pull-up jump shot. I thought Devin made a great play where he got in the paint late and kind of was stuck in there, and Jalen kind of snuck underneath and got a little foul on a layup. And we just made timely plays at the right time.

And that's players making plays. That's -- a coach, you call a play but in the end the players have to make the plays. And so they made their coach look good today because they made enough of them where we came out with a victory.

Q. Is that a game that maybe you wouldn't have won earlier in the season? Did you see some growth maybe today that you hadn't seen before and just toughness and resilience?

COACH DUTCHER: Yeah, I think everybody knows the back half of the conference season we've been a pretty good basketball team.

And it doesn't mean we've won all the games. But we played pretty good basketball. And I think a big factor to this game -- I don't know what Nathan played. I think Nathan only averaged like nine minutes in the game in the first two Nevada games because of foul trouble and maybe his bad back.

But he was out there 25 minutes. And maybe it's not reflected in a lot of the numbers, but his presence in there made a difference, though.

I liked the fact that we could keep Nathan out there a lot in this game. That's something he didn't do earlier in the season. We're playing good basketball right now. What that will mean tomorrow, I don't know.

Other than the fact we will compete at a high level. And if we do enough right things, we'll give ourselves a chance to make it back to the NCAA Tournament again.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

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Eric Musselman Tre'Shawn Thurman Nevada Wolf Pack

San Diego State - 65, Nevada - 56

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by Nevada head coach Eric Musselman and student-athlete Tre'Shawn Thurman. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH MUSSELMAN: Give San Diego State a ton of credit. I thought they played really well. Devin Watson had a really good game for them offensively. Having said all that, really, really proud of our team's effort. I thought we played as hard as we played all season long.

Difficult, obviously, when Caleb gets into foul trouble in the first half. But having said that, I thought we battled. I thought we played hard. So we just get ready for the next step and see what happens on Sunday.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

Q. What was going on with Jordan Caroline?

COACH MUSSELMAN: Jordan Caroline was held out tonight for precautionary reasons. It's been a long season. He's got a lingering injury and that's what it is.

Q. What do you attribute to San Diego State defensively to hold you only to 56 points and 6-of-24 from 3?

COACH MUSSELMAN: I had two all-league players not play in the first half. So I think if you took any team in this league and took two all-league players off the floor. I don't think the game have as close as it was. I thought our effort was phenomenal.

Q. Selection Sunday, what would be your message to committee room after what you guys have accomplished this season, 29-4, as to why you guys deserve a solid seeding, I guess?

COACH MUSSELMAN: I think our record speaks for itself, the body of work in non-conference, conference play. Unfortunately, we weren't fully healthy tonight and we will be going forward. And so, you know, that's it.

Q. Was Caroline able to play tonight, or if this was an NCAA Tournament game, would he have



played? What was the thinking behind holding him out?

COACH MUSSELMAN: I can't really answer that. I told you guys what the situation is. And so he's day to day.

Q. Tre'Shawn, you guys were able to bounce back. Last year you weren't on that team, but you were in the same situation where you lost in the semifinals of the Mountain West, and they were able to come back and win two games in the NCAA Tournament. I guess what's the focus of the team now? I know it's hard to answer this right now, but trying to regroup and making another run in the NCAA Tournament?

TRE'SHAWN THURMAN: Like Coach said, we'll just wait for Sunday. But right now our goal was to come down here and cut down nets. So I'm not really thinking about Sunday right now. We lost. And we didn't plan on losing a game coming down here.

Q. You guys come back from 13 down. You take the lead. They're kind of a mess. They're turning the ball over. They're not getting good shots. What changed there in the last five minutes? What were they able to do? What did you guys stop doing?

TRE'SHAWN THURMAN: It's really just a blur. I thought both teams were fighting. A shot went in for them, one or two, and one or two didn't for us. And that was part of the game right there.

Came down to the last minute. Both teams were fighting hard. They just happened to make a couple more shots than us at the last minute.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.