

# Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday March 7, 2020

**Brian Dutcher**

**Malachi Flynn**

**KJ Feagin**

**Yanni Wetzell**

**San Diego State Aztecs**



Utah State - 59, San Diego State - 56

**BRIAN DUTCHER:** First of all, congratulations to Craig Smith and Utah State. They've got a very good team. We've known that all along. It was a battle between two very good teams, and Sam Merrill made a really hard shot over a great defense played by KJ, and that was the difference in the game. Malachi had a look at the buzzer, and it kind of hit the rim a couple of times and didn't go in.

That's March Madness basketball. It just started in the conference tournament, and we will learn from it and we will be ready when we see who we play in 10 days.

**Q. KJ, on that last possession, obviously you're guarding Merrill, he's got the ball. What's going through your head?**

**KJ FEAGIN:** Just lock up. That's what's going through my head. Do whatever you do to stop him from making a shot. I felt like up until the release of the shot I was right there on every move, but props on him for making a good shot.

**Q. Yanni, in the first half you had almost a double-double, but in the second half you only had three points and three rebounds. What sort of adjustments did Utah State make in the post?**

**YANNI WETZELL:** I don't know if they made a whole lot of adjustments. It was just a matter of me putting two halves together. I think I performed better in the first half, and that's something I'm going to take and try and improve on, and promise you I'm going to put two halves together once that Tournament comes.

**Q. There's going to be a lot of fans who say this wasn't the worst thing in the world because you drop to a 2 seed, maybe stay in the west, who knows, but it could have been beneficial in that respect, but looking at your faces, it doesn't seem**

**like you feel that way.**

**KJ FEAGIN:** I think I speak for everybody when I feel like that shot and us taking this loss just took all the life out of us today. I wanted to cut down nets. We all wanted to cut down nets, and it was an accomplishment of ours. We weren't looking forward to the NCAA Tournament, we were looking at the task at hand, and we didn't get the job done.

**Q. You had a 16-point lead on them in the first quarter and they were totally cold, they went totally cold for about 12 minutes there. What do you feel like was behind that? Was that defense that you were playing, and what adjustments did they make or did you make that changed in the second half?**

**KJ FEAGIN:** I think we guarded hard all game. They just made shots. I think right now I can't really think of anything else to say. They just made shots when it mattered.

**Q. Malachi, what did you see on that final shot there?**

**MALACHI FLYNN:** I mean, I saw a look, and it missed. That's all that really matters.

**Q. Malachi, on that last play, it looked like you guys had something else diagrammed and when they called a time-out you switched to a different play; is that true?**

**MALACHI FLYNN:** Yeah, we switched it up at the end, and you all saw the result. Not because of the play, though.

**Q. As Coach Dutcher said, heading into the Tournament, there's going to be a lot of games like this that go up to the very last second. What do you think there is to learn from that game moving forward as you head into the Tournament?**

**KJ FEAGIN:** It's just a thin line between winning and losing, and as we look back on film, we'll see that we got a lot of opportunities to win, and we just didn't capitalize. Going into March, we just have to take away the mistakes and the small things and just the loose balls, the rebounds, the extra shots. We can't give that to other teams. It's just the little things. It's a thin line, and you saw it happen today.

**Q. Can you talk about the first half? It was the first**

**time you guys didn't trail and you guys didn't allow 50 percent shooting. What kind of changed defensively in the entire first half?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Sam Merrill decided to take over the game. That's it. And they Queta had a good low-post game in the second half. There were some shots that rang around and fell in. So Sam Merrill is -- I mean, he averaged 20 a game in the conference. But then he comes here, it's 27, 29, 27, so you know what it is. March is for players, and he played great today. He made the timely shots. He made timely plays, and he had a great game.

**Q. Dutch, you were up 24-11, they went 13 minutes without scoring. Did you feel that was kind of a missed opportunity at the time not to extend the lead at that point?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: No, I mean, both teams are playing three games in three days. There's tired legs. It's a game of runs, so they made a run. The three at the end of the half was kind of big for them. They cut it from 11 to 8, I think. So it gave them a little momentum and then they got off to a good start in the second half. Then it was pretty much back and forth at that point.

But Sam Merrill stepped up and made great plays. Basically the game ended like this: Our best player had a step-back three, he missed it; their best player had a step-back three and he made it. The current MVP, Malachi Flynn, had a shot, it didn't go in; Sam Merrill had a shot, it went in. So both coaches put it their best players' hands. Malachi even had a half-court shot that looked like it was going in. So that's March basketball.

And I thought KJ did a great job. Sam is a hard guy to guard. Even that one, the foul where they called a foul on KJ, there is a lot of contact there, and I thought KJ did a great job on that play, but he got called for a foul and Sam made a big free throw. He missed one, so it gave us an opportunity, but I thought KJ played great defense on that play, too.

**Q. Matt and Jordan only combined for four points today. Why do you think they weren't able to get anything going?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: You know, Jordan, they stayed out on Jordan. He couldn't find any opportunities. He was off the bounce, and they didn't want to give him any threes. Everyone knows that's what he does. So he spaced the floor, we tried to go to him at times, but he couldn't find any open looks on the lifts and that. They were out there quick on the catch, and he tried to go to the basket a few times off the bounce, but didn't go in.

Matt didn't have a great game today. Obviously I think he'd be the first to say that. I don't know what he was from the field, 1-for-7 from the field, 0-for-2 from three.

Not one of his better efforts, but like I said, it's three games in three days, and it's hard to play out there.

Matt will bounce back. Matt is a first-team all-conference player, so he had an off game today, but I don't doubt when we play our first-round opponent in the NCAA Tournament, he will be ready to go.

**Q. What does Malachi bring to the team when he's having a cold shooting night and not scoring as much as he usually does?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, he was not making shots tonight, and so I don't know if they didn't help a whole lot. They made him try to take some shots, and that's why the three-point shooters weren't open. They were crowded in on him. So they didn't help a lot. And he had opportunities to make baskets, and he didn't have enough go in for us to win tonight.

**Q. KJ mentioned that the team feels deflated from this loss. What do you say to them to reenergize them going forward into the tournament?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I tried to lift them up after the game as best I could, but they're competitors, they want to win every game. So I don't mind them being down right now. They'll get over it and we'll give them a couple days off to rest their legs up and we'll start getting ready for Selection Sunday and get the energy back.

But right now I don't mind that they're disappointed. They're used to winning. They've only lost one game to this point. They're not used to losing, and they're disappointed when they lose. I think that's a good thing. It shows their competitive spirit and how bad they want to win and how much energy they put into winning.

**Q. You could have 13 days before you play again, which is sort of an unprecedented stretch for San Diego State. How do you plan to use those days, and how much harder does it become having to sit on a loss?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I don't think it's that hard to sit on a loss. It's hard losing the conference championship in the last two seconds of the game. But we'll bounce back. These kids are -- they love basketball, so they'll be back in the gym, then we'll get them in the gym for practice and we'll find a way to get better.

You're not going to stay down that long. I mean, you look at all these conference tournaments, there's games like this all the time. You'll see it next week. Teams will lose in the championships but they'll be ready to go for the NCAA Tournament, and that's what we will do.

Last year at this time it was way harder. We lost and

our season was over. Right now we lost, and they're debating on TV right now whether we're a 1 or 2 seed, so there's not a whole lot to be upset about. We lost a really hard-fought game, but we'll be excited for our next-round opponent and excited to get into March Madness.

**Q. You kind of mentioned this at the end, but given the résumé and what happened in this championship game, as they debate a No. 1 versus No. 2 seed, I know you don't get to decide that, but what do you think your résumé should be in terms of that seed?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I think at the end of the year we'll have the best record in the country. I don't think anyone can pass it. No one is going to have fewer than two losses, and so we'll see if someone gets 36 wins and -- I don't know what the most games they can play.

Obviously we didn't play a full schedule. But we'll have the best record in the country, and walking out of the locker room, they had a TV on and I know they're already debating, should we be a 1 or should be a 2. Some of them are saying we should be a 1. That's going to be the debate. That's going to be the fun. That's fun for you guys over the next week to speculate that.

We can't control it. The conference tournaments will determine a lot who gets seeded where, but that's what makes this part of the season so exciting. And when our name comes up on the board, whether you're 16 or 1, you're excited to see your name come up. The kids are excited to see their name come up on the board, and the same thing for Utah State. Whatever seed they are, they're going to be excited when their name comes up, and that's everybody in the country that's fortunate enough to make this tournament.

**Q. Obviously when you talk about Utah State, everybody wants to talk about the likes of Sam Merrill and Queta, but in the second half there, it was Anderson and Bean's contributions that were big, particularly Bean on the boards and of course Anderson with some big shots. Your overall thoughts on those two guys in that second half?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, Anderson hit two big threes in the second half. Those were tremendous. Big, uplifting shots for their team. And then Bean is what he is; he's a warrior, plays hard all the time, gets in there, he rebounds, he makes plays, and he's an unsung hero.

We all look at the numbers, everyone looks at numbers, and they say Queta and Merrill, but Bean is a glue guy. Everyone knows that. We have great respect for Bean as a player and tried to do our best to keep

him off the glass.

**Q. You're talking about the NCAA Tournament and I feel like this has to be asked: The NBA just told their teams to start preparing to possibly hold games where there are no fans. Can you imagine an NCAA Tournament or what it would be like to play in an NCAA Tournament where there are no fans?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, if they send us out east, I hope that rule goes through, and if we stay west, I hope they let the fans come. So it all depends on where we get sent. So if we get sent east, no fans. If we get sent west, everyone can come. (Laughter).

**Q. You get a very unique turnaround in this tournament. You play two games in two days and then you come back in like 16 hours and play again. They moved it up even a half hour earlier this year. How unfair is that for players? In a lot of these games shooting percentages are really low, you see a lot of tired legs. I know in a perfect world you'd like to have more rest, but is it borderline unfair to make teams play this quickly?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, it's super hard. Play three straight games and not have a full day's recovery time, that's super hard on players, so there's no question about that. It's hard on both teams. But it's what we deal with for conference tournaments. It's what it is, and so we make the best of it.

But then NCAA Tournament is nothing like that. You get a day in between, you get a prep day, and you save up legs. You know, the NCAA Tournament is a lot more fair to a small team with not great depth because they get a recovery day. These tournaments are really hard, and we've got great depth. I thought our bench played well. They came in and gave us quality minutes, and obviously Utah State used a lot of their bench, they gave them quality minutes.

But is it fair? No, it's not fair for the kids to have to play a turnaround game in less than 24 hours.

**Q. You've gone on record saying that you would prefer to stay out west. Do you prefer having a 2 seed in the west than a 1 seed in the east?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I want to be a 1 seed, so I want to be a 1 seed. I want to be a 1 seed in the west. So we'll see what happens. I mean, I think we're good enough.