

November 26, 2014



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San Diego State – 59

An interview with:

**COACH MILLER
RONDAE HOLLIS-JEFFERSON
STANLEY JOHNSON**

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Coach Sean Miller, Rondae Hollis-Jefferson, and Stanley Johnson to the interview room. Opening statement on tonight's game?

COACH MILLER: First of all, the respect we have for San Diego State can't be any greater. We have some great, great games, important games, championship or in the NCAA tournament, and it was a big difference between winning them and losing them. But believe me, although we've won a few in a row here, each of those games could have gone to their side. Tonight was no different.

So when you play them, you get better and learn a lot about your team. To win the championship here at the Maui Invitational, you need great players, and you need players that rise up to a challenge, and these two guys right here, they earned their all-tournament accolades by their performance. Not their reputation, but how they played in these three games in three days. So we leave here feeling very good about what we accomplished. I know we have a long way to go, but I feel like our team really took a big step, grew up, improved, and that's what happens when you challenge yourself against this type of competition.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the players?

Q. Just being a freshman, are you surprised at how quickly you've adjusted to the college game?

STANLEY JOHNSON: I don't think I've fully adjusted yet, to be honest. There is still a lot

of stuff that we do as a team that I'm not physically good at yet. I think I've gotten a lot better since I got here, and I know me and Coach Miller in the meeting, he's just telling me to get better every day, even if it's a little bit. I've been feeling that part of it ever since that meeting. So I still have a long way to go as a player on the team. But little stuff our team knows about, but I've definitely gotten better.

Q. Rondae, can you talk about the defense on both sides tonight? It seemed like a real battle out there?

RONDAE HOLLIS-JEFFERSON: Well, San Diego State, they're a tough team, great defensively. We knew it would be a war out there tonight, and our coach told us that from the beginning. We take pride in our defense, and we all know that defense comes first, defense wins championships, and we just took our time out there and we were patient and it showed out there.

Q. Stanley, you had a great block with about eight minutes left. Just talk about that play and how it energized your team?

STANLEY JOHNSON: Saw the guy going down the lane, and we stopped the ball, he took a, I think a bad shot, and it was in the air so I just tossed it out of bounds.

Q. Coming down the stretch, you might not have adjusted to the game, but you adjusted to the spotlight in terms of having to hit those big free throws. And you had a lot of them at the end, and you stepped up to a lot of plays. Just talk about that?

STANLEY JOHNSON: At practice every day, Coach Miller takes free-throw shooting seriously. If you talk, you run. So it makes it easy to focus when you practice it. Once you practice so many free throws, you take it seriously in games and when it comes down to it, just like he told me in practice, you come to the line, knock the free

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throws down and let's go the other way.

Q. Stanley, I saw in most of the game your mouth piece is hanging out. Do you even realize you're doing that?

STANLEY JOHNSON: I just started wearing the mouthpiece this week. It's hard to talk, and sometimes hard to breathe, especially in a hot gym like this. I need to be able to communicate on defense, so sometimes I take it out at the beginning of the play. We scout stuff, and if I see something coming, I'll say watch out for this, that, and the other. During the play I'll put it back in and I can grunt and moan or something like that and they can see me coming through or whatever. But it's definitely not one of these things where I'm playing with something in my mouth, but I'm trying to talk.

Q. Stanley, I know you've been on a lot of big stages before you came to Arizona. How did this compare being a freshman in such a big tournament and then with the free throws and everything you did tonight. How did it feel out there?

STANLEY JOHNSON: It doesn't compare to what happened in high school. It's a whole different type of deal here at Arizona. This game is a lot more intense, a lot more energy used, a lot more effort. At the end of the game, you come up short here, and you go home with a really bad taste in your mouth. I think all of our team has a lot of heart and a lot of leadership, starting with Coach Miller, to T.J. and Brandon, Kaleb, to Rondae. We have a lot of guys that don't like losing here. That just helps me out, and I'm the same way. So as they go, I go. I think they're doing a great job helping me out.

Q. Rondae, can you talk a little bit about what this three wins in three days, the tournament title? Where can you go from here? Where can this kind of propel you right now?

RONDAE HOLLIS-JEFFERSON: Thanksgiving dinner (laughing). Seriously, you know, it's great to win tournaments like this. Very prestigious, great tournament to be at during this time. To come out with a victory is big time, big time, definitely big time. I think it's about the grind. It doesn't stop here. You win and you want to keep winning. So you've got to go back to practice and keep working hard and just prepare for the next win. Take it day by day, get better, honor the

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practice and work hard. You've got to enjoy it, man. Enjoy it, reap the benefits, and keep moving.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach Miller.

Q. Can you just talk about Stanley who was named the tournament MVP for this tournament?

COACH MILLER: Well, we know Stanley very well. We recruited him really for a number of years. This past summer I was one of his assistant coaches on Team USA Under 18, and I learned a lot about Stanley during that period of time. I feel like it was helpful here establishing a few things once he became a freshman at Arizona. When you have a player like him that is already given so many accolades before he ever plays a game or even practices, there is a fine line of bringing his talent along, and at the same time teaching him. I would say that over the last four or five weeks, Stanley as a player in our program has really become more of a student, like everybody else. He practices hard, makes mistakes, tries to learn from them. And that spurred him on to, I think, where he played in this tournament. If we would have played this tournament a month ago, he would not have been the MVP. But what I hope happens is a month from now that he's even more consistent on defense and some of the things that we're going to need him to be for our team to grow.

So we're pleased with Stanley as much as anything, because he's on the right track being very coachable, being a good teammate, and working hard. That's really where it starts especially with someone who has the talent that he has as a freshman.

Q. Can you talk about that same question I asked the players. What can this week mean for the team from here?

COACH MILLER: Well, we're excited that we won this tournament. Sometimes over the long haul we're in a program of great expectations. I think we all have to be careful that we enjoy what we're doing, and enjoy Maui, enjoy being here with each other, and enjoy this great moment that we have tonight, a hard-earned championship.

Now having said that, when we get back we'll have two games. We play Gonzaga next Saturday. So if we're not working to become better, we'll find out right away what happens when we play that game. We also play Gardner-Webb,

beat Clemson earlier. There is so much parity in college basketball. If we rest on our laurels and not improve the things we need, we won't continue to have the success we had in this tournament. But we have a good group. Rondae and Stanley both guys know how to win. They came to Arizona in large part to try to win these types of things that we're in. So from that perspective, we have a great group of kids and we're excited to move on.

Q. I was just wondering if you could elaborate on what you and Stanley were going for there. Whether a lot of what you wanted from him was that approach and attitude, things like that or is it more so skills? You had said he was kind of a different attitude starting the year.

COACH MILLER: Stanley is a very intelligent kid. Played at Mater Dei High School. Think about this, he won four consecutive California State Championships. I think he's won three gold medals, and yet never played in college. So he came to us very decorated as a winner. I kind of let about six to eight weeks ago just trying to talk to him and watch him move through it. Then I think the meeting he's talked about was one of those where he needed to do a better job working every day. He didn't know how hard college basketball was. None of these guys do. But to his credit, like I said over the last four to six weeks, he's really, really turned that part around. I think his teammates expected a great deal. All of a sudden, he plays like he played here. And that's what happens when you process like we tried to talk about.

He's doing a better job of making every day important, and not cutting corners. That's why he came to college so that he gets better on and off the court. And I think he's really doing that.

Q. You really stopped them the last eight, nine minutes of the game. I think outside of those last two threes, they had one basket. Did you change something? Did you notice some tendencies? What happened there? Did you guys just sort of dig in?

COACH MILLER: No, we really didn't change. Sometimes if you're a very good defensive team, and I think we are, as the game wears on, it becomes harder and harder to score against you if you stick to what you do well.

Rondae Jefferson is an incredible defensive player, and once we got through not fouling, we didn't foul as much in the end as we did

throughout, that helped us. The story line goes both ways. San Diego State had a bad night from the foul line. They needed to make their free throws tonight. If they did, we might have lost. As coaches we've all been there. In games like this, you need everything. Their free-throw shooting certainly hurt them. Nothing like we did.

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