

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 11, 2023

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

San Diego State Aztecs

Coach Brian Dutcher

Jaedon LeDee

Matt Bradley

Aguek Arop

Postgame Press Conference

San Diego State - 62, Utah State - 57

MODERATOR: Again, I repeat. We do need to make this a little bit quick. They do need to get to their flights.

BRIAN DUTCHER: First of all, congratulations to Utah State on an incredible run to get to the finals. They're primed and ready for the NCAA tournament. They're a very good team. We were very fortunate to win today, and I tell the guys at the start of the year that we're one of the few teams when the shot won't go in, we can still find a way to win. We can hang in there and make enough timely plays to win a game. I think we were two for 19 from three today. We had a lot of open looks that didn't go in. They had a lot of open looks that didn't go in. But that's what it looks like when you play three games in three days. You shoot on tired legs, and not everything goes good, but it was a beautiful finish for us, and we're grateful for an opportunity to hang another banner and our goal is now to try to do something important in the NCAA tournament next week.

Q. Jaedon, what kind of impact did you have on the game today? Offensive rebounding, scoring in the mid-range game. You did so many things that it seemed like you felt comfortable and it really came together?

JAEDON LeDEE: I think I was just playing the flow out there with my teammates. We've been playing for so long this year. I was just comfortable, like you said, and they believe in me, and today was just my day. But like yesterday wasn't my day and they picked me up and I think that's one of the biggest things about our team. You never



know whose day it's going to be.

Q. Matt, talking about when Jaedon is on the offensive glass like that, how much does it impact what you guys are doing?

MATT BRADLEY: Jaedon. AG, everybody. Especially Jaedon. When he gets the ball, he's such a threat so when he's off the ball and able to rebound like he does, it makes our team so much more dangerous. So hat's off to Jaedon and AG for what they do, but big game for them, and that's what we need going into March Madness.

Q. Following up on that, Jaedon and AG, you guys combined to draw 11 fouls and got 12 free throws. In a game where shots were not falling, how important was it to get to the free throw line, get them in foul trouble and get points that way?

AGUEK AROP: When shots are not falling, Coach always says we gotta get to the line. Offensive rebounding and drawing fouls, pump faking, getting to the line when shots are not falling, watching the shots go in, you start to get in the flow. That's just what we do. Me and Jaedon play hard and try to make winning plays for our team.

Q. Aguek, before the season you told me that you came back for your fifth year to get some closure. I know you're not done yet, but is this the type of closure you had in mind? And what did it mean to have this type of performance after everything you've battled whether it be injuries and all that stuff throughout your time here?

AGUEK AROP: It's most certainly special. Step one was winning a regular season conference. Step two was winning this. So I'm on the right track to closing it out right. It's been a real special year. It's been a lot of ups and downs throughout my career, and I couldn't be any more happy or any more proud of the guys that I'm playing with. If it wasn't for them, I don't know where I'd be. I'm just really thankful for my teammates. They're really like brothers to me, and we're just trying to keep this train rolling.



Q. Aguek, I've been watching this team for four years, and every time you're on the court, you consistently look like the hardest worker. Where does your energy and work ethic stem from?

AGUEK AROP: It's from my parents and from God. God has bestowed on me just the uniqueness of being able to perceive and have the self-awareness of my gift and where I can contribute to the team, and that's going out there and playing hard. I'm not going to be one putting up points, but I know myself, and I'm just glad to be out there and do what I can. And so the work ethic comes from God and from watching my parents doing what they do for me and my family and just to not want to let them down just knowing I just gotta seize my opportunity whenever I'm out there.

Q. Jaedon, you've had a bit of an up-and-down season, started only one game, but really, it's come together here in this tournament. How does it feel to make the All-Conference team?

JAEDON LeDEE: It's a blessing for sure. I can't do it without these guys, these two dudes up here, everybody in the locker room. It's a team sport, and like you said, up and down. When I'm down, they carry me, and then when I'm up, they're still there with me. So I think it's just kudos to them.

Q. Matt, before every game you make a prayer on your Instagram story. In a championship game like this, what went into making the prayer today?

MATT BRADLEY: Yeah. The prayer today was much needed. I think it was just giving honor to God, more importantly. We pray after our games. A group of us pray before the games, and that's what we gotta do. We gotta glorify God through it all, win or loss. And the feeling I had last year in the tournament is a complete 180 from how I feel now. To be able to flip that around and come back for my second year here and win, I'm just thankful for everything that took place within it and especially God and my teammates. Yeah, it's a good feeling right now. Thank you for mentioning that.

Q. Matt, you've had to wait pretty much a whole year since the NCAA tournament for another shot at it. It's almost here. Now that every other game is out of the way and the next game is going to be the NCAA tournament, how much are you guys sort of itching to get a little redemption and get to that game and play it?

MATT BRADLEY: Yeah, we're fired up right now. We're going to have fun tonight, celebrate on the way home, but

starting tomorrow, our eyes are looking forward to what's ahead. And we know we got a lot of potential to make some noise in March Madness. We're not putting a number on where it's going to be, but we're just going to do the best we can. We know we're able to win a lot of games. Yeah, we're 0 and 0 starting tomorrow, and I think our team is ready to go.

Q. Jaedon, you come to this program, and you were so impactful off the bench this year and today. What does this mean, what does this win mean to you?

JAEDON LeDEE: I think it's great. I mean, it always feels good to win, and I mean I kind of watched from the sidelines last year, and I kind of know how they felt last year coming up short a couple times. I told Matt and everybody before the year I wanted to make sure they go out with a bang, get these wins this year, so it feels good. But we got another task ahead of us.

MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen.

Q. Utah State's pick and roll offense was giving you guys a lot of trouble in the first half with Shulga and Bairstow. What was working so well for them against your defense and how did you guys turn it around?

BRIAN DUTCHER: We played 'em the same way the first two games. We were just in drop. We call it violent drop. Drop back to the rim as fast as you can, retreat and make them settle for midrange, but they were destroying us on ball screens. And so our second option, and we did it all game against San Jose, was switch every ball screen. So we started doing that and it slowed their momentum down. So I don't know at what point we did that. I think we did it right after I took the timeout in the first half. We switched up how we were playing it. First timeout, we were concerned but we said we think we can do a better job of it. We tried to and it wasn't working. So we switched up how we played ball screens and it kind of changed the momentum of the game for us.

Q. As you peek ahead to next week now, when you get a game like that out of Jaedon Ledee, what goes through your head in terms of how the dynamic of the team might change by next week because of that level of play and there was that stretch where he came out just before the under 8 and there was a long review on the shot clock violation and then almost got to the under 4. Hadn't had any fouls, played really well. Why was he out for that stretch?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I don't know. Probably should have had him in. No. We're deep, you know, so one of the reasons we win is because we just seem to be fresher than

teams down the stretch. So usually Nate closes games for us defensively, but Jaedon was playing so well he was in a lot at the end of the game, even at the defensive end. Like I said yesterday after the game, I look in the locker room and we got nine different guys that have led us in scoring. So it might be Jaedon's day today, and it might be Nate's tomorrow, and it might be Micah's the day after. Our depth is our strength, and we just don't know who it's going to be on any given day, but they all have opportunity, and whoever is rolling plays the most minutes.

Q. Coach, Utah went on a 13-4 run about halfway through the first half. Aguek came in the game, scored an and-one, got a block, steal and an assist and helped you guys cut the lead to one at half. How big of a spark was he in that first half?

BRIAN DUTCHER: You've just seen it for five years with him. He's all energy. He's just a ball of energy. He brings it to the court. He brings it to his life. He brings it to the people around him. So he's an incredible leader and an incredible player. And he's a catalyst for a lot of good things that we do on the court.

Q. Coach, end of game inbounding has been an issue this year. Today in that situation no Darrion, no Lamont. Looked like Micah Parrish was the guy that you were trying to get the ball into. Is that something different that you were looking at to be more successful in those?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Micah for the last six, seven, eight, nine, ten games is the guy that we try to throw the ball to on the inbounds. And he seems to be the most secure with it. He's tall enough to see over traps and strong enough to split them. So we put Micah in that position. Obviously Adam's been taken out a lot as a sixth-year senior trusting the decisions he's making. So it's something we work at every day. Doesn't mean you're going to have success, but we spend the time to try to be better at it, and we were able to get the ball in and get to the foul line down the stretch today.

Q. Do you think you're a five seed?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I think we're a four seed, but we'll see what it is. Our numbers are great, and our conference is great. And we won both titles, and we won the regular season by two games. And we're playing good basketball. So hopefully people are watching and take notice of that.

Q. Would you be disappointed with a six?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I don't react to any of that, because I don't have anything to do with it. Whatever they say we

are, we are, and we're going to win from that position, whatever that number is.

MODERATOR: Okay. Looks like that's good.

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