

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 16, 2024

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

San Diego State Aztecs

Coach Brian Dutcher

Lamont Butler

Jaedon LeDee

Postgame Press Conference

New Mexico 68, San Diego State 61

THE MODERATOR: For San Diego State we have student-athletes Lamont Butler and Jaedon LeDee, Coach Brian Dutcher. Coach, some comments on today's game?

BRIAN DUTCHER: First of all, congratulations to Richard Pitino and the Lobos. To play four games in four days and come out with the title is really impressive. Hats off to them.

Obviously we're disappointed, and we should be. We wanted to hang a banner, win another Mountain West title, but it didn't happen, but we can't have a lingering effect over losing.

I think we played good basketball here the last three days in Vegas, and that was important leading into the NCAA Tournament, which is the dream of everybody. That's what you grow up wanting to play in.

So as disappointed as we are over losing today, our best basketball is ahead of us. We're excited to hear our name called tomorrow, and we will be ready to play. We will learn from tonight, and we will hopefully make a deep run in the NCAA Tournament starting this next week.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Guys, I know it wasn't the result you guys hoped for, but as you enter Selection Sunday, what are you guys most excited about getting a chance to maybe make another very deep run in the tournament?

LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, I mean, the tournament, that's



what we set out to do. The tournament, last year we had a great run, and this year we're trying to prove people wrong again.

I feel like we can go in there and make some noise, and we're going into it with a positive mindset and get better from this loss and go in there and try to get some more wins.

Q. Lamont, a lot of -- big part of you got the defensive scores in turnovers and scoring off of it. Zero points off turnovers tonight. What were they doing so well that was making it hard for you to get the ball and get out in transition?

LAMONT BUTLER: I feel like they? Were getting the ball on the rim, and they was able to get some good shots from House and Mashburn, and they were getting offensive rebounds. It was really hard to pressure them because of how quick they are and how fast they are.

It's something that we're going to learn from, and we're going to figure it out.

Q. Going off that last question, Jaedon, you didn't score a field goal until the last four minutes of the first half. What was it about their defense that limited your play in the first?

JAEDON LeDEE: I wouldn't say limited. They was loading up in the gaps and in the paint, so I was trusting my teammates, and they were hitting shots early. I mean, just they had a game plan, and we just pivoted off of what they were doing.

Q. For both players, if I could. I was wondering, that was a madhouse in there. What's your best description of what it was like to play in this league in this season?

LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, I mean, this league was phenomenal this year. We had really good teams. Every game was rowdy. Every game was some close ones, some upsets are. We had fun playing in the league. I feel like it really prepared us for the tournament coming up.



We're going to be ready to fight and ready to play hard and win.

JAEDON LeDEE: Yeah, it was a great league this year. I mean, just it's preparing us for the NCAA. You can't take any games for granted this year in the league, and that's kind of how it is in the tournament, so it was good preparation.

Q. Jaedon, what went wrong during that five-minute stretch late in the second half? Do you think fatigue helped there?

JAEDON LeDEE: I'm not sure. Maybe you're talking about the last five minutes. I mean, just they hit some shots, we didn't. That's all I can really tell you from that.

Q. Jaedon, I'm pretty sure -- I just double checked the stats, but I'm pretty sure you broke the single-season scoring record for San Diego State. What does that title mean to you?

JAEDON LeDEE: I mean, it's just a nice accomplishment. I wish we would have won today. That's kind of what's on my mind right now, but I mean, yeah, it's a nice accomplishment.

Shout-out to my teammates and coaching staff putting me in good positions, but yeah, that's all I got.

Q. This is for both of you guys. You guys obviously made a big run to the championship game last year. What do you guys think is the one thing you have to improve on heading into your first game next week?

LAMONT BUTLER: I feel like we improved a lot. Especially this weekend, or Thursday through Saturday. I feel like just finishing off every possession with a rebound, I feel like that's going to be important for us going into the tournament. Then just continuing to play with the confidence that we play with.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes at this time. Thank you, men. Questions for Coach.

Q. Aztecs were 4 for 29 on three-pointers and while New Mexico was 6 of 20. What's the difference maker between that?

BRIAN DUTCHER: They played a great first half. They made a lot of shots, but they had five at halftime, and I know they only made 6.7 a game, so we were playing good defense. They were just making some shots. That's a big part of it.

I thought our defense was solid, and the defense was pretty good all game. I think both teams struggled to score the ball. I don't know what they shot from the field at the end of the day. 37%. We shot 35%. Defense was a premium today.

It was second chance opportunities down the stretch that won the game, whether it was a missed free-throw, a put-back opportunity. We caused initial misses, but we didn't finish it with rebounds, and that's the difference in the game.

Q. Jaedon LeDee, 25 points, and he also went for 11 of 11 from the free-throw line. I know the loss obviously stings, but what makes a player like Jaedon LeDee so great and able to lock in at a level like that even if he's not necessarily statistically the best free-throw shooter?

BRIAN DUTCHER: He's a pretty good free-throw shooter. But no, Jaedon shot 11 free-throws. I thought he could have shot 20, but that's tournament basketball. That's officiating. You don't know what's going to be called or not called, and it was physical today.

I thought we got downhill and got to the rim, and the only one really rewarded with free-throws was Jaedon. I don't know if anybody else -- how many everyone else shot on the team. Jaedon took 11, Reese got three and got fouled on a three-pointer. It was physical. Both teams played really physical. It was hard to get a foul out there. It's want just one team. Both teams. That's March basketball.

You better play to two feet and jump stop and play through contact at this time of the year.

Q. Your teams are kind of, especially this year, known for just playing great defense and getting the opposition in kind of a meat grinder and grinding them down the second half. I was kind of curious, it seemed like you had the Lobos there midway through the second half. I was wondering, were there any clues about why this particular game you just couldn't close the deal in this particular game?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I mean, House is a big reason. His body type allowed him to play four games in four days. I mean, if he's a big, physical guard that would wear down, but he doesn't wear down. He is blessed with an athletic live body, and I know he is tired, but he was sensational.

They just put him in ball screens. He refused ball screens, and he drove the ball. That was the game. There wasn't any pindowns for jump shots. There wasn't throw the ball in the post and get any production.

It was House downhill, miss a shot, and if he missed it, they rebounded it. That was the game.

He was sensational in a big game and hats off to him for being the player he is to be able to do that on a fourth straight game.

Q. Do you think the teams in this league are now officially sick and tired of each other in and ready to go play someone else?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, no question. This is a Mountain West game. They're all like this. They're all close. They're all hard-fought. Points drop. This is a dynamic offensive team that scored 60-some against us, and we only scored 61.

Everybody knows each other. They know what they do. They take away each other's strengths, and then it comes down to a timely play or two.

And that's what happened tonight. They made more timely plays than we did down the stretch.

Q. It's been mentioned that some of the team seeds in the Big Dance might be higher than your own conference. I'm just curious, at the end of the day how many teams do you think are coming out of Mountain West tomorrow?

BRIAN DUTCHER: No doubt six will go out of the Mountain West. I don't know how they could take anything less than six. They were always talking that New Mexico was on the bubble. Their NET ranking was in the 20s. I didn't ever see that.

They left all doubt to rest by winning the title. I can't believe there will be anything less than six Mountain West teams in The Dance.

Q. Despite the loss, the team was still able to finish strong towards the second half -- or towards the end of the half these past three games. How important do you think that will be towards your tournament play?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, we're tough. We got grit about us. We don't give in. Down 17 yesterday. Down 12 today. We just keep fighting. We cut the margin to six I think at halftime today and built momentum and took a second half lead. It went back and forth, a couple of lead changes, and unfortunately, we didn't close the game out.

We had open shots. We missed some open shots that if you are going to win a title, you have to make, and we

didn't make them. We went to Jaedon a lot. They helped, and he kicked it out. That's why I know the first half he didn't score early because he was kicking the ball out.

And that's what good players do. When they draw two or three players, they kick it out, and we have to make shots when he does.

Q. Different players this year obviously, but what makes you believe you can make another run? What about this specific team makes you believe that a run is in them?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Just because I like how they're wired. I don't think they get discouraged when they get down. They're mentally tough. They don't make excuses.

That's what you have to do.

You're going on have adversity in the NCAA Tournament. I just think we have a toughness about us that we've gained through experience that will show in March. That's the hope.

Q. You mentioned slow start. I think it's now 13 out of your last 14 games you've trailed early. Is that a viable path to winning in the NCAA Tournament? Are you going to have to change that?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Obviously everyone wants to get off to a great start, but it is what it is. All we can do is create open shots, and if they go in, we'll get off to a better start.

We go to Jaedon early, and they double him and he kicks it out. I think we had a couple of wide-open looks off post doubles early, and you make them. All of a sudden you're off and running. If they don't go in, we don't give in, which I like about this team.

We understand that it's a 40-minute game and that if you are going to be behind, the best team to be behind is early. So you've got time to fight back, and we fought back in every game.

So I'm proud of how hard we are wired as a team and hopefully that leads to success in the NCAA Tournament.

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