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An interview with: San Diego State



THE MODERATOR: We're going to let Coach Fisher make some opening remarks.

COACH FISHER: Feels good not only to be here, but to win and to advance.

Well documented this is our first NCAA post-season win. Our players don't care about that. They've only been a part of one other and they like this a whole lot better than a year ago.

We got what we wanted, and we had a great group of San Diegoans who came here to support this team. It felt like a home crowd. It felt like a home court and that's immensely helpful.

We knew this would be a hard-fought game. This is a good team we played. And we found, like we have in 32 other victories, a way to win games and we're a good spurt team. We can get points in bunches. We did that again today. And everybody contributed. So this was a really good team victory and we're very proud of them.

Q. Kawhi, you look like you really had your shot going early in that game. Did you want to explore your offense in this one when you felt like you had it?

KAWHI LEONARD: No. You know, Coach Fisher just did a good job the day before at shoot-around letting us put up some shots, getting our rhythm on the court. And today my team did a good job by penetrating and just giving me wide

open looks and then I just felt confident shooting the ball.

Q. Just for all you guys, do you guys feel any sense of relief here?

D.J. GAY: Relief? Kind of. But we're not, you know, satisfied just yet. We know that we're a very good team that's capable of making a run. And this one feels good. But if we win the next one, that one will feel a lot better.

CHASE TAPLEY: I mean, like D.J. said, it was a relief, but we still have work to do. We still have a big game on Saturday and keep moving. Keep the winning streak going on.

Q. D.J., what does it mean to get this win for Coach Fisher, knowing it's been 12 years wanting to get a win here for San Diego in the tournament?

D.J. GAY: Just shows how Coach Fisher's been patient with this program, and how he's built it up to what it is now. It feels good to, you know, to give back and in a special way that the team can.

You know, this win was for Coach Fisher. It was for us. And it was for everybody back in San Diego.

Q. D.J., what kind of boost did Rahon give you off the bench tonight?

D.J. GAY: Rahon is a spark for us. He can come in the game and knock down shots when we're struggling offensively and he is a good defender as well. So he -- when he comes on the court we don't lose anything at all. He comes in and he helps the game go up to another level. We can always count on him. And when he gets an open shot, everybody in the gym expects him to take it.

Q. Kawhi, in your early looks in the first half when you were hitting threes, were you getting another second to square up and look



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that you normally wouldn't get?

KAWHI LEONARD: A little bit. I guess, the game plan was letting me shoot the three without closing me out. They just closing me out with no high hands at all. Then the shot was basically wide open for me to shoot. You know, I just felt good shooting it.

Q. D.J., you haven't scored in so long, what did it feel like when you finally made one?

D.J. GAY: It felt good, you know, to finally hit a shot.

You know, I've been in a slump lately. My offensive game hasn't really been what it has been in the past. But, you know, the key thing is doing other things to help this team. If I'm not scoring the ball, then it's getting the ball to the hot hand, help running the offense. And on the defensive end as well. So, I mean, you know, my shot will come. And I just got to stay confident in myself. And when I get the opportunity, take it.

Q. Now that all is said and done, was guarding Beitzel anything like guarding Jimmer Fredette?

CHASE TAPLEY: All of us -- they're similar. I mean, Fredette really takes you off the dribble and Beitzel really comes off screens, but they're both really good players and really can shoot the ball and he was on today.

Q. D.J., you say sometimes your job is to get the ball to the hot hand. Is it easy to recognize, for instance, 13-0 run in James Rahon knocking down points, is it easy to tell he is the guy to get the ball to?

D.J. GAY: Absolutely. But it wasn't just James Rahon. We had four guys in double figures today. This is our team in a nutshell. We can win on the inside. We can win on the outside. We had guys knocking down shots. Billy, Kawhi played big for us. When James is hot like that, we do have to find a way to get him the ball, just like my other teammates.

Q. D.J., this is a game you used to play 40 minutes in. You got 34 minutes tonight. Can you talk about the rest and why you rested?

D.J. GAY: Why I rested?

Q. Yes.

D.J. GAY: I think that coach is doing a better job managing my minutes. Early in the

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season my body hit a wall after a certain point. And, you know, this rest has given me the ability to, you know, catch my breath even quicker, to see the game from a different point of view, and to observe. So when I go back in, I can adjust.

Q. Kawhi, can you talk about when they would cut it to five and kind of keep themselves in the hunt what your focus was on, you know, the next possession to at least come out of there with points. If you remember back off a miss from somebody when you went in for the rebound and went up and caught it just right and almost dropped it and what that felt like. Do you felt like that gave you some momentum at that time?

KAWHI LEONARD: You know, if the lead's close, me and my team know that we need to get a stop on defense in order to build up the lead. So we just all zeroed in just on defense and was ready to get out there.

But, you know, I just crashed the boards like I usually do. And I lucked up and got the offensive rebound and put it back in.

Q. Billy, can you talk about how the size and length of your front court seemed to frustrate them and handicap them tonight?

BILLY WHITE: We just, you know, just tried to play like we usually been playing. You know, coach just told us to crash the boards a little bit more. We knew that was -- they're an offensive team, they like to crash the boards. We just try to use our length and try to make them take hard shots. That was our game plan.

Q. Billy, how did you prepare for Northern Colorado's post players now that you got to play against them in person, was it kind of what you expected?

BILLY WHITE: Yeah. We knew they're physical. We knew that they're a physical team and they like to get rebounds. So we just watched tape on them and just prepared on them. We just tried to play our best. And that's what we did. We just used our length like we usually do and just got rebounds.

Q. D.J., not exactly the Viejas Arena, but can you talk about the show and the students you could hear out there and how they supported you?

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D.J. GAY: They've been big for us all season long, whether on the road or at home. They stuck with us from our first exhibition game until now. We all appreciate what the fans do for us.

If things seem to -- the energy seems to get low, the fans do a great job of standing up, clapping and cheering and getting us all energized. We call them our sixth man. And, you know, we couldn't ask for a better sixth man. The show and the fans that made the trip out here, they help make this a special season.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, guys, thank you very much.

We'll open it up for Coach Fisher.

Q. Steve, you talked in your press conference on Monday and then talked again and made a point of it yesterday, I guess, when you talked about them and how well they rebound, and how they came into your place three years ago and you saw how well they rebounded. Obviously, that was a point that you wanted to address. What did you do to help your kids create so many lanes or whatever openings to get, especially on the offensive board. Was there something in particular you saw that was going to work?

COACH FISHER: No. We've got length. We've got athleticism. And we have the ability to go after the ball. Kawhi's the best offensive rebounder I've ever coached. And he only had one. The one you talked about where he put it in.

Billy White has had back-to-back seven offensive rebound games. He's had seven straight, I believe, double-figure games. And several back-to-back double-doubles. So we've got a variety of people that can go after balls. And we've got length. And we pursue the ball.

What we did, we showed them clips of the Northern Colorado game; both game one when they beat us in our building, game two when we had a narrow victory back up in their building, and how they did it. They wedge as well as anybody in the country on the weak-side rebound. And you have to hit first. And they got several tonight. This is a good team. This is a well-coached team.

So we prepared our kids, not that they needed to, but to say, This team beat you. And this team expects to beat you. And you have to see how they beat us in our building.

I think it was helpful that we were able to show them some of those clips.

Q. Can you talk about the role team defense played in tonight's victory?

COACH FISHER: We're a good defensive team. We led our league in field goal percentage and three-point field goal percentage. We've done a really good job of not giving teams transition open looks. And that wins for you.

We say, contest the three. We wanted to contest the threes with this ball club tonight because they make eight or nine a game. So we have a defense that we hang our hat on. And that allows us the kind of ebb and flow and ebb and flow and all of a sudden get that 10-nothing spurt, get that 13-nothing spurt. And we've done that with some consistency this year. And it starts with how you guard. And you got to finish guarding with rebounding the ball.

Q. How concerned were you when Beitzel went on that run early in the second half to cut it, I guess it was three? Then what did you do after the to slow him down and the rest of them down during that, I guess it was about a seven-minute scoreless drought?

COACH FISHER: Beitzel, not unlike Jimmer Fredette, he wears No. 32. And he plays the same way. Chase made a good point. He gets a lot of his looks off of multiple screens. Fredette creates a lot of his own shots. But I've got great admiration for Beitzel and how he played.

I think at one point he had every point they scored in the second half. He scored their first 11, 13 points in the second half. And some of them we were on him. He just made some hard shots.

And what we did is rotate a body or two on him. Chase started on him, Chase Tapley. Rahon guarded him. Then we said, If it's a screen, you know, Billy, you got to be prepared. Malcolm, you've got to be prepared to drag and help until he gets back. So we, as the second half went on, we made it a little more difficult for him. And he missed some shots.

Q. Coach, I was going to ask if you could talk at the beginning of the game, maybe the first 14 minutes when it was back and forth three-point game, what were you telling your players in time-outs and if you can just touch on again what Beitzel's performance kind of showed you tonight?

COACH FISHER: We said you have to continue to compete. You are not going to score

ten points in a possession. We are playing against a conference champion, a conference tournament champion. We're playing against a good team. Be patient. Don't get frustrated.

We had multiple shots, I thought, early that, you know, Malcolm had that didn't go in. We had a lot of inside shots that didn't go in. I think we got a little bit frustrated offensively.

I thought we shot a few quick shots that were good shots as opposed to making an extra pass, swing it from the right side to the left side, and turn a good shot into a great shot, and let them get a little tired. We got tired chasing Beitzel. So we said, Let's make them chase you a little bit. I thought we did a better job of that in the second half.

Beitzel is a terrific, terrific player. And a great competitor. We knew, they knew they wanted to get him multiple looks. As he came out in that second half, he got them and made them. Most of them we were at least able to get a high hand up. And some of them we contested hard and he still made them. He is a very, very good player.

And I told him after the game that, congratulations on a fantastic career. And I watched him since they beat us when he was a freshman. He might have been a red-shirt freshman. He came into our building and I told our players he played 20 minutes, he had 7 for 13 or 14, he had 15 points in our building when they beat us and he made shot after shot after shot. And he's done that for his career there. He is a very good player.

Q. Lute Olson had a chance to talk to you and your team after the game. Can you talk to us about the message he gave to you and your players.

COACH FISHER: Lute and I have been friends for a long, long time. He came in his locker room, which is the locker room we have, and he went around and talked to some of our players individually. And he just talked about our team and the length that we've got and how we can do what we've talked about all year. Score in multiple ways. We're hard to score on even when it looks like they're good shots. And was very, very complimentary. Then he went around and shook several hands and told them the same thing.

Q. Coach, D.J. seemed very proud to get the win for you. He said this win is for Coach Fisher. How does that make you feel

and did the players say anything to you in the locker room?

COACH FISHER: This win wasn't for me. You made him say that. (Laughter.) This win was for our program, our team and everybody that's been involved in our program.

I've been there 12 years. D.J.'s been the cornerstone of our team for four years. He's been a phenomenal leader, a great ambassador for San Diego State. Forget about athletically. San Diego State University. He is eloquent when he gets up in front, does all the right things.

So this was a win for everybody that's been associated with San Diego State. And maybe not even -- I need to go beyond our 12 years. For everybody that's put on a San Diego State uniform or walked the halls and gone to class there, we got a lot of proud Aztecs today. And we are proud also.

Q. Couple of things. One, how about the coach? Is there relief in the coach? Do you feel like a load has been lifted? And, two, did you want the team to shoot that many three pointers early?

COACH FISHER: You know, Nick, I'm not going to say "relief." I would have been despondent had we not won, obviously. But I was not extra nervous about a game that we were supposed to win. The first time in my tenure at San Diego State that we were supposed to win a game. And we did.

So it feels good to get a win. It feels good to say we're coming up last to talk, that we're going to be playing on Saturday. So from that standpoint, it does. It feels good.

I don't know that I would use the word "relief" though. I'm proud. I'm proud to be part of what this program is.

Q. Three pointers?

COACH FISHER: Oh, three pointers. You know, you can't tell them not to take open threes. I'm going when Billy White made his three, I'm going no, no, no, no. And he made it. So you can't be afraid to take a shot. We were 4 for 8 in the second half. We were 5 for 14 in the first half. And I thought most of them were good looks.

I think what we said at half-time was if you are a bit more patient you will get better shots. So we only took eight in the second half and made four. That is pretty good.



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So we were better in terms of moving the ball in the second half and passing up a quick early shot to get a better shot.

Q. You talked about your spurts, particularly in the second half. This one was key not only by Kawhi and Billy, but James Rahon. Can you go through that run in the second half.

COACH FISHER: James Rahon, well documented. We recruited him when he was a sophomore in high school. He is from Torrey Pines High School right down the street. He opted to go away to Santa Clara. Then he opted to come home. We were so excited when he transferred in.

He can do more than just shoot the ball. But he's a rhythm shooter. He can get on a run where he can make multiple shots. And he's done that not just today. But he did that today in the stretch that kind of took a close game and gave us some separation.

And our kids, as D.J. said, they recognized it, we got him some back-to-back looks, and he made shots.

Q. Can you give your thoughts on D.J. Gay and the slump he is in.

COACH FISHER: D.J. Gay is not in a slump. The ball is just not going in for him. D.J. Gay is a winner. He does everything we ask. If you come back and look at the film and watch how he guards and watch how he helps with his defense and moves the ball and does things that win, I'm not going to get caught up and I'm not going to allow D.J. to get caught up in going 0 for whatever he did in the first half and making two baskets.

Everybody wants to score. You feel a little better about yourself when the ball goes in. But you can't judge success individually or team-wise on 2 for 11 or 0 for 9 or whatever it might be. We don't win without D.J. in this line-up. He knows that. And I know that and everybody else knows that.

Q. Coach, Kawhi, what did you think of his performance?

COACH FISHER: Kawhi is a terrific player. He's done for two years for San Diego State what everybody hoped he would do when he came in much hyped and ballyhooed as Mr. Basketball. He's unafraid.

A year ago when we played Tennessee, they backed off him and dared him to shoot the

ball. And I believe he was 0 for 4 in the first half from three-point range. He is a gym rat. He takes great pride in being a player.

We talk about big hands, we talk about rebounding, Kawhi Leonard is a player. And he finds ways to make plays that you win with. And he was very instrumental in our victory tonight, no question.

THE MODERATOR: Okay, coach, thank you very much.

COACH FISHER: Thank you.

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