

# Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday March 8, 2018

## Brian Dutcher

## Malik Pope

## Matt Mitchell

## Trey Kell

## San Diego State Aztecs

San Diego State - 64, Fresno State - 52

**BRIAN DUTCHER:** First of all, I think the Aztec fans travel. What a great turnout for us today. If history is any indicator, we'll have double that at tomorrow's game. And they're important to our success. We want to thank them for traveling and supporting the Aztecs.

I think we saw the improvement is we're better defensively. We're harder to score on. We look like Aztec teams of old, where we can struggle through an offensive period or two because our defense is so strong. And that has kind of spearheaded our 7-game streak right now. And we have to continue to defend if we want to advance in this tournament.

Defending the three was a big part of the game. I think they only had three 3s, we only had three 3s. It was old-fashioned basketball, it was slug it out, nothing easy, two opponents that knew each other well, and both played well.

We actually hit a spurt where we came away with a victory. So proud of both my seniors. When I took this job I told them I could think of two better seniors that I want by my side than these two with me, Malik and Trey, and I told them that when I was named many months ago. And they've been the key to everything for us and me to be able to rely on them on the floor over this last season. And I just want to tell them how appreciative I am of them. Along with the freshman Matt Mitchell, who he's learning from the seniors, I hope.

So with that I'll take any questions.

**Q. They had a stretch there where they didn't score for six minutes, they had five straight turnovers. What's that like on defense when you're just getting stop after stop? Can you sense their frustration or does it energize you to get those**



**stops?**

**TREY KELL:** A little bit. I feel like the main thing you feel is the offense starts to press. And with them I felt like they tried to -- during those times they just try to give it to one of their better players and go one-on-one. That's something we worked a lot on where we don't allow anyone to go one-on-one against us. It's a team effort.

So they made some tough shots. But at the same time, I feel like we did a good job of playing one-on-one defense, but at the same time having the help side ready and making plays.

**Q. Matt, you took two charges, talk about taking the charges, and Tim Shelton is sort of the master of that. What did you see on those plays and how important was that to you?**

**MATT MITCHELL:** I just saw an opportunity to take a sacrifice for the team, and really just create more opportunities offensively, less for them, for us on the defensive end. So really, it's just an opportunity to sacrifice my body for the team and help out in any way that I can.

**BRIAN DUTCHER:** I had that on the board defensively, who is going to take the first charge? I asked that question in the locker room and had four or five guys raise their hand. We're not the shot-blocking team we've been in the past. But we have to stop the ball somehow in the paint, and we've done a good job over the last two or three weeks of sacrificing our bodies and throwing them out there and taking charges to let teams know that it's not a free path to the rim whenever they want.

**Q. It seemed like you got the ball early a lot and were doubling a lot. Was that part of the game plan to establish that inside game with you?**

**MALIK POPE:** From the early get-go, yeah, just to put a little pressure on the defense and see how they react. And luckily I was able to make good plays.

**BRIAN DUTCHER:** Both Trey and Malik do the right things. If they draw a double team, they move the ball. If they play one-on-one, they're both capable of scoring. There's great comfort as a coach to put the ball in their hands and know the right thing is going to happen.

**Q. This is your 11th straight win in a quarterfinal in the Mountain West Tournament. Were you aware of that streak and why is this team so good in these games?**

TREY KELL: I had no clue about that streak. I just feel like we lock in really well in the first game and we don't take any game for granted, no matter who the opponent is. Tonight we played a really good Fresno team. And there was some added motivation knowing we haven't beat them yet this year, especially the last time we played them the way we lost. So I think we just, like I said, we don't take anything for granted.

**Q. San Diego State has been known for how great they played defensively the last several seasons. This season you started off and you didn't seem to have that defensive prowess. What is it that turned on in the second half of the conference season that you guys have really started showing up defensively?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I think the two main things. We've been anchored by shot blockers for a lot of years. We had Skylar Spencer who was the all-time shot block leader in this conference; Angelo Chol; we had Valentine Izundu last year to block a lot of shots. And we didn't have a shot blocker. We moved Malik in the post this year. He usually has played stretch four out in the perimeter. It took him a while to provide the help he needed to provide; ball screen help, helping up early, baseline drive, shutting that down. And so as Malik has continued to grow his game defensively, we've gotten better.

And added to that, we didn't take a lot of charges early. So we've made an emphasis that if we're not going to block shots, we have to take charges. And over this last win streak we've taken quite a few. We had a few we tried to take today that were blocked, but at least we're thinking that way, we're throwing our bodies out there and trying to protect the paint area. And we've done a lot of better job of that over the last seven games.

**Q. What was your sort of take from the sidelines watching that stretch where they didn't score a basket for six minutes and kept turning the ball over?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: You know, it's like anything, when you slide behind a little bit you have a tendency to press, and that's us, any team in the country. You keep looking at the clock and seeing you're just a tad behind. And they have really good players. So they tried to press their game a little bit, which they should have done. And they had a couple that wouldn't go in for them. They got quality looks that didn't go in.

To our credit, we didn't give them a lot of second shots. I thought we did a pretty good job on the glass in the second half, we held them to one shot pretty much every possession down the stretch.

**Q. So you get Nevada now. How hard is it to have to beat a team that good, ranked team that quality, twice in six days?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: They're a fantastic team. We can all see that. What they've done with their body of work this year. And it's going to be a real challenge. But having just played them less than a week ago, the game prep is pretty much the same for both teams, I'd imagine. There will be a tweak here or there, but in playing in 24 hours, there's not a lot each team is going to do. We are who we are.

We'll come out and try to defend them at a high level and limit their three-point looks, like we did tonight. And then hopefully do a little better job on Caroline. He was sensational against us the last game. He had 29 and was a dominant player in the game.

The Martins are good, Caroline is good, Stephens shoots the ball. They've got a lot of talent. They're shorthanded without Lindsey Drew. But what they have is good enough to win this tournament and what we have is good enough. I think it's going to be a real battle tomorrow.

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## Rodney Terry Deshon Taylor Bryson Williams Fresno State Bulldogs

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RODNEY TERRY: Don't mind my voice right now. We give a lot of credit to San Diego State. They've had a great finish to their season. We knew we were playing probably the hottest team coming into the tournament. Give their seniors a lot of credit in terms of how they played down the stretch. Kell had a big game today. Pope is always a problem to deal with. Brian has his group playing at a very high level right now.

Take my hat off to my guys. I thought my guys competed hard today, like they have all season long. And we just lost to a better team today.

### **Q. The stretch coming out of the under 12 timeout in the second half, the five possessions.**

RODNEY TERRY: You had to take care of the basketball, and this team has done a pretty good job. We felt good at the halftime, we only had four turnovers at the half. You've got to value taking care of the basketball down the stretch, especially in postseason play. And those possessions down the stretch compound without getting a stop on the other end, and those guys got a chance to get a little separation at that point. And we were fighting uphill from that point.

### **Q. (INAUDIBLE)?**

RODNEY TERRY: I think that at the end of the day we always talk about fundamentals is really important, that we stick to the fundamentals, and make the simple play. And give them credit, their defense was in the right position at times to take some of the things that we were trying to do away.

DESHON TAYLOR: We just didn't execute our game plan, like late in the second half, like you said, we turned the ball over like five times in a row. We were trying to put the ball inside, but it wasn't going our way.

BRYSON WILLIAMS: Yeah, we had five turnovers in a row. It was a real bad stretch. We just didn't take care of the ball. And we have to do better with that. And we



really worked all year hard on taking care of the ball. And we really take pride in that. And we just didn't do a good job of it tonight.

Give credit to San Diego State, they're a real good defensive team. And we just had the turnovers.

### **Q. You have to play with who you have, but how much do you miss Jaron in a game like this?**

RODNEY TERRY: Well, you can always have some injuries, and that's just part of the game. We tried to not let it be an excuse or something that can hinder the remainder of our season. We lost Jaron, who was playing probably as good as any guard in the league at the time. We won five in a row, and the first ten minutes in Wyoming and we're up one when he goes out.

And it changes your team. You have to adapt and adjust. We had to do that. We weren't able to play probably as fast as we were in the past. We relied on getting transition baskets. He was a speed guy for us. A guy of size. And he was our lead rebounder.

So put all those together it was a major loss for us. But we never tried to make it an excuse for us in terms of not having him. We always tried to say next man up, and somebody else needed to step up for us. That's going to happen in sports and also in life. Someone goes down, next one has to step up and do the job better and try to do it at a high level.

It was a huge loss for us size-wise, you play a big guard team like San Diego State, they did what they were supposed to do, they ran sets where they tried to isolate the ball, we would have done the same thing if we had the advantage of guards in terms of size. With Jaron you don't have that mismatch. You probably have one smaller guard on the floor as opposed to having two smaller guys. And that's worked for us at times as well.

It's a huge loss for us. We're not going to downplay like it wasn't. But we're not going to make any excuses, because we played a lot of games this year without Jaron.

### **Q. You played San Diego State in February. They went after you. They went up to Nevada and got**

**drilled. And then they haven't lost since. The last time you played them until now, why are they so much different or better?**

RODNEY TERRY: The senior players. You don't have a guy like -- you take Kell or Pope off the floor, it's like taking Jaron off the floor for us. That's a big piece you're missing. Kell is a good player. He was the First Team All Season selection for a reason. He's a senior, he's a good player. He's made big shots over the course of his career. You take him out of the lineup that's a big piece. He had nine assists against Nevada. He's older, he's been through the battles, he's played on good teams over there.

We played him when he was a freshman to go to the NCAA tournament. You can't put a price tag on that experience this time of year. And the urgency you have to play with. Kudos to him, kudos to Pope, those guys are playing like seniors down the stretch right now.

My young players here are good young players, and they're going to have a chance to gain valuable experience and hopefully be those type of guys as they continue to get older as well.