

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 12, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

San Diego State Aztecs

Coach Brian Dutcher

Nathan Mensah

Adam Seiko

Trey Pulliam

Postgame Press Conference

San Diego State - 63, Colorado State - 58

THE MODERATOR: We welcome San Diego State to the podium.

COACH DUTCHER: As much as yesterday's game was a defensive struggle at the start, today's game was an offensive explosion. Looked like Roddy was going to make every shot he took at the start of the game. Colorado State is a very good team, they're well-coached, they play hard, they play the right way.

But I've got a group that does the same thing. And we felt good about our performance. We shared the ball. We performed under pressure. And we found a way to win a really close game against a very good basketball team today. So we're grateful for that.

Now the task at hand is to get back to the hotel, a quick turnaround and get ready to play at 3:00 tomorrow and try to hang a banner. So that's the task. And I've got the group of guys I'll go to war with to try to do that.

Q. Adam, in that second half, the Rams really wouldn't go away. Seemed like they kept drawing the lead back to six and eight. But you guys continued to answer possession after possession. Could you just talk about your ability to keep extending the lead as the game went on?

ADAM SEIKO: Yeah, you know one thing we try and do is make sure our defense is always on point, no matter if our offense is struggling. It's a long game. It's a game of runs. We always talk about that in the huddle. We'll go on a run.



They'll go on a run. But we try to stay the course, try to defend and rebound, do the little things that earn us extra possessions.

And credit to them, they fought hard. They played us well. They hit some tough shots for sure. But I'm glad that our guys made winning plays down the stretch at the end.

Q. Trey and Nathan, you had a lot of success on the screen and roll tonight. What were you seeing, how were they defending it, and why was it so open there?

TREY PULLIAM: I just seen they were hedging it. The big was out. If it's two on me then somebody got to be open. So all the bigs were rolling. That's what I saw coming off the screen. I just tried to look off the bottom end, and then just hit the big, hit my target.

NATHAN MENSAH: Throughout the game, Coach was emphasizing on me rolling straight to the rims, and Trey gave me like the first look in the first half. From there we had to like stick to it. I just saw rewarding it. So we just stick to it over and over (indiscernible) couldn't stop it no more.

Q. You guys had a 16 assists on 22 made shots. Seemed like every shot came off a back cut or you were just moving the ball really well. Matt Bradley, your leading scorer, only had five points. Could you talk what you were seeing offensively and how this game was just a collective effort?

ADAM SEIKO: Yeah, I would say we are at our best when we move the ball. We're at our best when we assist each other. We like to practice how we play. And for someone like Matt, who is getting all the attention; they're out there doubling him and playing him very hard. He understands the game. He understands that sometimes it's good for him to be a decoy out there and do the other things on the court to help us get easy buckets.

And just credit to Trey, our point guards and everybody else on the floor finding each other tonight.

Q. Trey, I'll pose this question to you. Standing in the



huddle during those final 10 seconds what was Coach Dutcher telling you in that huddle before that inbound play?

TREY PULLIAM: Just to get the ball inbounds. Be strong with the ball. We had one timeout. I mean if we got caught up, if anything happened, just finish the game, really. That's it.

Q. In Coach Dutcher's five seasons now he's been to the championship, the Aztecs have been to the championship every single season. Could you say what that means about Coach Dutcher and to the Aztec assistant coaches?

ADAM SEIKO: You know, it's crazy that for the amount of time I've been here I made it to the championship every year. Coach Dutch and our staff, like we say, they have the best scout in the country, we scout the best in the country. We prepare the best in country.

And credit to our guys. Every guard on this team is selfless. No one has an ego on this team. We all come into the practice with the same mindset and goal, and that's to win the regular season conference and win the conference championship.

We have guys with experience who have rings with Trey and Nate and AG and down the line. So it's no surprise that, we feel it's no surprise we're back here again. And we're looking forward to beating Boise tomorrow.

Q. 41 wins now at the Thomas & Mack Center since the 2008-2009 season. Obviously you three haven't been here that long, since 2008, 2009, but what makes it so comfortable to play at this center, I guess?

TREY PULLIAM: You saying playing in Vegas? I just feel like it's good energy every time we come out here, especially right now with the tournament. All the fans in here. You've got fans from different programs stuff like that. So it's real intense and hostile. I mean, it's good energy in here. It's a fun place to play.

ADAM SEIKO: Credit to our fans as well. Our fans always show out when we're here, even when we're playing against Vegas, UNLV. So credit to them always.

Q. Nathan, after the game, when you were doing interviews, the fans were chanting one more year, one more year. They did that at Viejas Arena on senior night. How does that make you feel when you hear that? Does it surprise you, and is it going to weigh into your decision?

NATHAN MENSAH: I (indiscernible) the love that the fans have for me and my teammates, and how far they have seen us come. They expect the same thing over and over. But San Diego State will always be a better team with or without Nathan. After it's all said and done and with tomorrow's game I'm just focused on tomorrow's game and getting to the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Yesterday you talked about how on short turnaround you were just going to focus on adjusting as the game goes on. Colorado State opens the game making their first six shots. What happened during the first TV timeout? Did anything change defensively?

COACH DUTCHER: No, I told them that we were playing really good, that they were making hard shots, and we were getting the shots we wanted. Hopefully at some point the game would settle in -- we'd make a few and they'd miss a couple.

They got off to a great start. I thought our offense was good at the start. The ball wouldn't go in. Eventually we started making some shots.

I don't know if this has happened in a while but all nine guys who played scored a basket for the Aztecs. We got contribution from a deep bench. And that was important.

Q. Could you just talk about your team's effort? Seems like you guys got every loose ball, outrebounded them by eight. Had 13 offensive rebounds. Could you talk about that?

COACH DUTCHER: We wanted to attack the offensive glass. It's hard to score in the half court, so we have to find ways to either get a fast break, get an offensive rebound/putback. They're called easy baskets but there's nothing easy about them.

So we got enough fast-break points, not a whole lot because they do a great job in transition defense and we got a few putbacks, and that was the difference in the game.

Q. Is there are a certain level of satisfaction for you as a coach when you have nine players score? You didn't have to rely on any one guy to do a whole lot, but everybody did their part.

COACH DUTCHER: I think for a while everybody was wondering, could the Aztecs win if Matt Bradley didn't score 30 points. We've won two games where the defense has taken Matt away and other guys have stepped up made important plays. We have a good team. And they play well together.

And it's great that Matt has played enough basketball to realize that when all the attention's turned to him someone else is opened. He had three assists tonight. Matt played a good game even though he didn't put a lot of points on the board. He played a good floor game.

Q. Bradley obviously had four personal fouls and Mensah fouled out in the final minute. How much did these personal fouls, how much did that change your game plan coming into the final minute of the game?

COACH DUTCHER: They were both out there for the majority of the game. I thought Nate's last foul was kind of careless, to reach over and give them two free throws with no time running off the clock. So I've got to catch myself as a coach and realize there's still a minute, eight to go. I can teach him later. I want to teach him right at the time, I was so mad.

But I let him go sit down and hopefully we won't commit that kind of foul again. But Colorado State is dangerous offensively they were getting up the floor and making shots and attacking us downhill. Every time we made a free throw they were downhill right back at us. That's good coaching and a good, talented team we played.

Q. Quick turnaround, 15-hour turn around. What do these next hours look for you as a coaching staff getting players rested and treatment and all that?

COACH DUTCHER: I said I'll probably let them sleep until 10:00 tomorrow. And have an hour prep in the ballroom. Eat pregame at 11 and then come over here and play at three. That's all it will be.

It will be intense, whatever we do. It will be film where they've got to pay attention. It will be walking through a thing or two we think are important.

But March is for players. You play three games in three days. That's for the players. They have to be at their best. We can help them along some of the time, but right now March is for these guys to shine in hard moments and these are hard moments and we'll see how both teams shine tomorrow.

Q. What were you seeing in the middle screen and roll, and why was it so effective tonight?

COACH DUTCHER: Just that they were keeping two on the ball for a dribble or two, trying to send Trey back or hedge a little bit. So that means the roll was open. And Trey had to decide if the roll was open or if the lift was open. If they had to help back with one of the guys in the

corners. He made a couple of good reads. The bigs rolled all the way to the rims. And sometimes those passes occur really late as their big is trying to scramble back.

That's a credit to Trey. Everybody runs the same stuff but you have to have players to make those plays. And Trey was the quarterback and he found the wide receiver, basically, in the end zone on a couple of those plays.

Q. I know a win tomorrow gets the automatic berth, gets another banner in Viejas. But how important is a win tomorrow in regard to seeding for the NCAA Tournament?

COACH DUTCHER: I think every game is important. I think the win today should help us seeding-wise. Then we'll play another quad one game tomorrow against Boise and we'll see how it goes.

But it's kind of nice to know I feel as if we're in the tournament. So basically we're just playing for a better seed. We've been fortunate enough to hang banners. But we have new guys in the program that have never hung one. I said let's win it for the new guys. Let's let them know what it feels to hang a banner.

So for Matt and Tahirou and Chad and some of the guys that are new to the program, try to win one for them. These guys are selfless, that's what they'll try to do.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

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Coach Niko Medved

David Roddy

Isaiah Stevens

Postgame Press Conference



celebrate that. And then we're going to turn our attention and we're going to try to win in the NCAA Tournament.

Q. Isaiah, Niko touched on it, there was a six-minute stretch where they had a six-point lead, you had multiple chances to cut it down. How frustrating did that get when you don't make that rush?

ISIAH STEVENS: You definitely start to feel it a little bit. But at the same time if we have the ball in our possession and we have the ability to go make a play, and we just weren't able to make those at the clip we needed to tonight.

But we'll look at the film. We'll learn from it, and we'll grow from it see how we can attack those situations better.

Q. David, I know you had two big goals this year. One was to win a title here. One was to get to the NCAAs. You get the second one. Is there a little sting? How much sting is there to not getting the first?

DAVID RODDY: There's a lot. We had two opportunities to win, regular season and the tournament championship. We came up short. But that doesn't take away the fact that we're going to be seeing our banner on Sunday.

So, again, like Coach said, we'll flush it and focus on whoever we have to play. But the season has just been an amazing journey of ups and downs as well as just so much growth, just personally as well as just with the team. So I couldn't be more proud of the way they played. And we have a lot to learn.

Q. Three games in this stadium this year you guys shot in every way kind of worse than your season average. Is there any reason that you guys can pick out, are the sight lines uncomfortable or what?

ISIAH STEVENS: We just didn't make the shots. I don't really know what to say to that. I promise you it's not on purpose. That's all I can say about it.

DAVID RODDY: Kind of the same way. Just that's it.

San Diego State - 63, Colorado State - 58

THE MODERATOR: We welcome Colorado State to the podium.

COACH MEDVED: Tough loss. Really hard-fought game. Give San Diego State a lot of credit. They're a tough team. Really, really battled.

I thought our guys battled like crazy the last 15 minutes. We probably didn't have that same mentality early in the game.

But, you know, you look at it, and I think we had that at six for a long time. Every time we had it at six we just couldn't get over the hump, whether it was a key turnover, a defensive miscue. And then despite all that, we made another run at the end there.

And we just couldn't get a stop in a two-point game when we needed it. And give them a lot of credit. To win a game like this you've got to make your free throws. We shot probably uncharacteristically poor from the free-throw line tonight.

But that's basketball. And give San Diego State a lot of credit. And I told these guys, like we've done all year, this one's going to sting. And it should sting. These guys are competitive, and we wanted to win.

But when we wake up tomorrow we're going to let this one go. And we're going to turn our attention to Sunday. And Sunday's going to be a special day. This team has had a phenomenal season. And it's going to get a chance to play on the biggest stage, in the NCAA Tournament. They've earned that. When we get a chance to do that we'll



Q. David, you guys had a highly physical defensive game last night. Another one tonight. Just what kind of toll does that take on you guys physically and maybe mentally as well?

DAVID RODDY: It does take a little physical toll. But we're used to it. Again, this is our third Mountain West tourney as well as in the NIT last year was kind of a similar way.

But the training staff has done an amazing job with us this year -- Tony. And just veterans on the team just trying to get in treatment as much as possible is what really makes this team special. And, again, making late runs into the tournament.

Q. You guys weren't able to take last year's postseason loss and follow it up with three postseason wins in the NIT. What can you take from that? And can you take anything from that experience of just kind of turning heartbreak and focusing it on the next goal at hand?

DAVID RODDY: That's what we do. Every time we lose a game this season, we kind of bounce back. Using that, all of last year, is still fresh in our minds. We still remember that feeling on Sunday, waiting an hour and never seeing our banner.

For us, it's just -- again, we're going to see it, and now we're just going to try to embrace it and enjoy the moment as much as possible and play as hard as we can.

Q. Isaiah, good start to the first half. The beginning of the second half, didn't have as many looks, but got going later. What was San Diego State doing defensively, or did it just take you a little bit longer to get in the rhythm?

ISAIAH STEVENS: They're one of the top defensive teams in the nation. I'm not a guy that tries to go out there and just force the issue. I'm the point guard. I'm supposed to be able to control the whole show, get shots for myself as well as the guys around me.

And so definitely want to stay aggressive. But at the same time, just not trying to force the issue, like I said, and their style defensively. I was trying to be aggressive as much as possible without forcing the issue.

Q. I know you had a couple of defensive keys tonight. Did it seem like you didn't do a bad job defensively but there were just enough moments where some of them weren't covered that it hurt in the end?

COACH MEDVED: I thought late, as the game went on we

did, I don't think early we did. I thought we had too many miscues on rotations, ball screen coverages, appropriate help.

And then you give them credit. Some of those guys, Arop made a 3 for them. Pulliam made a big 3. But we made too many mistakes. Gave up an offensive rebound on a free throw, left Bradley wide open, we came off a strong side help on Seiko and gave their shooters open 3s that way. And then too many easy baskets in the paint.

I thought we tightened up as the game went on. But I thought we let some of those guys maybe get into a little bit of a rhythm.

But all in all, we did a lot of good things tonight. We just didn't do them for long enough periods of time to get a win.

Q. Roddy and Stevens accounted for about 75 percent of your point production. What can you do better to help get other guys in the rhythm and more scoring opportunities?

COACH MEDVED: I can say great point. I don't know. This was one game. We've had a lot of guys followed us throughout the year that stepped up and had huge games. For us, tonight just wasn't one of those nights.

We had some good looks from some other guys, and they didn't go down. And so I think that happened tonight. I don't think that's been a characteristic of our team. That way we've had a lot of different guys on different nights that have really stepped up.

And it's a good point. Tonight we needed probably somebody else to just make a few more shots and plays that way. But guys -- the game, as much as we missed some free throws, but the game was right there. It was right there. And it was going to come down to the wire. And tonight give San Diego State credit, they made a few more plays than we did.

But like all these other ones, it was going to come down to the last three minutes, and it did tonight. And we had our chances, but we just didn't get it done.

Q. If someone told you that you were going to hold Matt Bradley to seven points and you were going to shoot 48 percent against the number one and number two statistically defense in the country, only going to score 63 points, would you have felt pretty good?

COACH MEDVED: That's a great point. I would have felt really good about that. But you've got to give them credit. And Dutch does such a good job with those guys. Other

guys stepped up for them. I thought Pulliam really played well tonight and some other guys made some key shots for them.

But, yeah, I think we probably would have taken that, coming into the game, but then I thought we did shoot 48 percent, but there was more out there for us.

We were going to have to get over 60 at least to win. But they're a good team. They're going to play in the NCAA Tournament like we are, and they're there for a reason. And just like we are.

Tonight was their night. But going into the game I thought we did a nice job on Matt Bradley. I think overall, other than turning it over a little much, other than that little stretch, I thought we were able to generate some quality shots tonight.

Q. Just the big picture, when you look at the whole season, was one of the things that, I guess, the way you scheduled, you're hoping that you guys could build so that a moment like this doesn't prove decisive going into Sunday, and can I do that work during the season and prepare through that schedule?

COACH MEDVED: Yeah, we know this, we decided going into the season, we were going to go for it. We were going to try to schedule up, play as tough a schedule as we could.

And I thought the league was going to be good. I didn't even realize how good the league was going to be. And I said it -- I didn't say it out loud, but I told a lot of people, I said: My goal for the regular season, maybe more than any, was I wanted to show up here in Vegas at this tournament and feel like we were in. You know?

And we did that. That's hard to do. You know what I mean? That's really hard to do. So our guys had a phenomenal season. We came here. We want to win this tournament. And hard-fought win last night, we didn't.

I think this team's prepared. I think they have confidence, and we'll see what Sunday looks like. But because of the way we've challenged ourselves in the non-conference and the league, I think our guys will take that and have confidence going in so whoever we play in the first round of the NCAA Tournament, we're going to go for it and try to give ourselves a chance to win.

Q. Despite tonight's loss, how would you describe their efforts in this 2022 season, and what do you plan to look forward to this Sunday?

COACH MEDVED: The season's just been phenomenal. These guys just all the way around. The way the guys have played. The fan support. Being ranked. I could go on and on. I'm so proud of these guys. It's been so fun. And Sunday's going to be a special day.

When you talk to any kid, and you recruit them, they say I want to play in the NCAA Tournament, Coach. Every kid dreams of that. That's what they watch growing up. And they want to be a part of that.

And there's so much that goes into it. The amount of work and the pressure and the ups and downs and understanding what this team went through last year. It's going to be an emotional day for them because that's what they've wanted. And they've earned it. They have earned it. So that's going to be a really cool day.

And just like today, we'll worry about it. But on Sunday, Sunday is going to be a day to celebrate and for these guys to feel really good about what they've accomplished. And then like we always do, we're going to wake up Monday and we're going to get ready for whoever we play and we're not there just to be in the tournament. We want to go and try and win.

Q. Talk a little bit more about -- you just commented that every kid wants to be in the tournament. What these guys have accomplished to help you sell this program going forward when you're talking to a young man who wants to be in the tournament.

COACH MEDVED: I think it's huge. People when I was fortunate enough, and people believed in me to hire us -- and this was our vision.

Our vision was to build a great program that could compete at the top of the Mountain West and have a chance to go to the NCAA Tournament.

And we've been able to do that. I think now we want to celebrate this moment, but I agree with you, how do we build on that? How do we continue to grow as a program and do that and give ourselves an opportunity to compete at this level year in, year out. It's very difficult to do.

People don't realize how hard it is and the work that you put in and the level you have to play at consistently over the course of the season.

But it's a great stepping stone. It's a great building block for us. And we'll enjoy this moment, but I agree, I think it's something that we can build on and that's what we want. We want to be able to do that consistently.

Q. The Mountain West in the last, I think, four or five years in the NCAA Tournament is 1 and 7 in the first game in the tournament.

COACH MEDVED: I knew you were going to bring that up.

Q. Looks like you're going to get three, good chance you'll get four teams in. How important is this tournament for the league as a whole to gain the trust of the selection committee and the public at large that this is a really competitive league; you send four teams, they go in four, it can hurt that?

COACH MEDVED: I think that's a good point. I don't know if it affects the selection committee as much. I'll give them credit in saying that they take every year in and of itself. But I think for the brand of the league, yes. I think for the brand of the league to prove that -- the league's gotten a ton of attention this year. And it should. The league's played at a very high level. But we now have an opportunity to go out there on the big stage and find a way to win.

And I'm confident that we can do that. But it is big for the brand of the conference. I think that we've got a lot of momentum right now. And man, if we can go out there next week and find a way to win some games -- we've got four really good teams. If all four get in -- I think they all deserve to get in -- they're all terrific teams. They're going to play other terrific teams.

I think it would be huge for the Mountain West to try to go out there, make some noise and continue to get everybody who maybe is not staying up tonight to watch the semifinals on the East Coast, to realize that this is high-level basketball being played here. And I think it's only going to get better.

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