

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship - Final Four: Florida Atlantic vs San Diego State

Saturday, April 1, 2023

Houston, Texas, USA

NRG Stadium

San Diego State Aztecs
Coach Brian Dutcher

Lamont Butler

Matt Bradley

Jaedon LeDee

Semi-Finals postgame Media Conference

San Diego State - 72, Florida Atlantic - 71

COACH DUTCHER: First of all, I want to say how fortunate we are to beat a really good Florida Atlantic team.

Dusty did a fantastic job with his squad. And it's hard because more than one team are deserving. And we found a way, Lamont found a way to make an incredible shot to send us to the next round.

Congratulations to Florida Atlantic, an incredible team, incredible run.

We're proud to be moving on representing San Diego State and the city of San Diego in the championship game Monday night. Looking forward to it.

Q. Lamont, what was going through your mind on that last play? Were you going to shoot it no matter what, or what did you see?

LAMONT BUTLER: Coach decided to call a timeout at the end. It was about seven seconds after we got the ball, and he told me to go downhill, get something at the rim. They did a good job cutting me off. Once I looked up, it was two seconds left, I knew I had to make a shot. I got to a shot I'm comfortable with. Went to a pull-up; glad it went in.

Q. Lamont, you've had just a few minutes now to process it. Has it sunk in what you just did here?



LAMONT BUTLER: A little bit. A little bit. Like I said, I don't think anything will sink in until it's over with. I'm just so happy that we're in this position and we have a chance to win the national championship.

Q. Matt, you've had some poor shooting performances in the past this tournament, but tonight you picked it up and were the go-to guy. What was different? How did you feel?

MATT BRADLEY: I just felt good. I had two bad shooting performances these last couple of games. And I just got back in the gym. My teammates were encouraging me, my coaches. Spent some time praying, doing what I need to get right. I trust myself, most importantly. I'm thankful I was in the position to come through.

Q. Matt, talking to you yesterday, on top of all of this other stuff, you are like very close to your degree. And I just wanted to know, we kind of, like, dismiss student-athlete, it's all about the sports, but how has this journey been for you being on the road, managing the schoolwork with the basketball? Because I can only imagine how crazy it's been.

MATT BRADLEY: It's been the longest month I've ever been a part of. Every day I'm dedicated to being better as a player, as a teammate. But off the court, definitely, we have the resources to get us better, in the classroom. We have tutors here. We've got free time to do whatever I have to do. Cactus KI comes through clutch, just getting organized. It's hard, but it's manageable.

Q. Matt, can you take us back to the second half, you're down 14, FAU has a lot of momentum, Parrish picked up a technical. What was the huddle looking like to fight back into that game?

MATT BRADLEY: We were just motivated. We'd been in that position so many times throughout the year. We've always been knocked down. But the biggest thing we always do is get back up and keep fighting.

We have a lot of maturity on this team. That was nothing to us. We knew we had time on our side. We just got

together and fought back, and I'm really proud of our guys.

Q. Matt, I think there was like a two-minute span you guys had nine offensive rebounds during that rally. How big was that? You guys ended up with one more rebound than they did. And that's something that they've been able to do, is outrebound teams.

MATT BRADLEY: We know in order to win this game we had to do all the little things, get loose balls and offensive rebounds when we had a chance. That's the type of team we're made up of. We have guys that are willing to put themselves out on a limb, make plays like that. Even when the ball is not going in, we trust each other. We make second efforts, offensively and defensively.

That's what we have been doing all year, and that's what got us to the championship game.

Q. Jaedon, quite a homecoming. Could you talk about being able to have this kind of game happen in your city?

JAEDON LEDEE: It feels good. The team played well. I think the shot FAU played, they kept us down the whole game, but we found a way to win. Like Matt played sensational, Lamont hitting a big shot at the end. And everybody, I think everybody contributed. I feel great. I think we need to get another one.

Q. Lamont, after you made the shot, you didn't look like you had much reaction. Were you just trying to look cool? Or was it more just shock what just happened?

LAMONT BUTLER: A little shocked. Like I said, I didn't really know, I mean, how big it was. We're going to the national championship. That's not things many people do.

Like I said, I was happy it went in. It felt good once it left my hand. I'm just happy we're in this position.

Q. Lamont, when you got down into the corner, along the baseline, it looked like you weren't going to be able to get a shot off. Then you made the move to the left to clear yourself. Can you say what you saw when you got to that point? Were you concerned that you were not going to have a chance to beat the clock?

LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, for sure. Like I said, he cut me off on the baseline. It wasn't really many angles I had. Like I said, I got to a shot I'm comfortable with, one-dribble pull-up, I just tried to set, I was going to the rim, and I just rose up and hit the shot.

Q. The timeout with like 36 seconds left, maybe 40 or so, was it something you were looking for to get a 2-for-1 there and get Jaedon to go quickly so you had a chance to get the ball back?

COACH DUTCHER: I wanted to sideline out of bounds and take a look at a 3, but we had enough time if we didn't have a 3 to give it to Jaedon to get downhill. He had just gone downhill the play before.

He's a tough guard in isolation basketball. I would have taken the 3. They did a good job. We just went to Jaedon, and he got downhill.

Q. Coach, could you go back to -- you were going offense and defense with Lamont and Darrion and Matt, et cetera, and you had a timeout at the end to bring in your offensive group. What was your mindset that you wanted to let that play through the group that you had been putting in on the defensive side?

COACH DUTCHER: Just a feel. I figured we'd get the ball somewhere around seven seconds if we were lucky. I thought at that time let's just go downhill. I had three bigs in the game. I had Keshad, I think, AG and Nate. I told them: You three guys run to the rim; Lamont, you go to the basket and let's see what happens.

Lamont made the shot. I always say March is for players, not coaches. Lamont made a play, and made an old coach look good.

Q. About a month ago I saw Lamont do the same thing in The Pit. Different from where he shot it. I'm curious how much trust you had in that moment and you telling him get to the basket because of what happened a month ago?

COACH DUTCHER: I told him in Albuquerque to get to the rim too, and he shot a pull-up 3 and made it. I'll quit telling him what to do and just say: Lamont, you get the ball. And I'll live with whatever happens.

Lamont has made -- most guys dream of making one of those plays. And he's made a couple already this year. And on as big a stage as there is in the national semifinals, to make that shot was incredible. I can't wait to go back and see it on tape.

Q. You have some transfers, FAU has some transfers. Because of that, are we just going to see craziness like this every year, you think, in the tournament, and does this just give everybody hope?

COACH DUTCHER: I think there's more parity than there's

ever been. So hopefully on Selection Sundays they don't ignore mid-major conferences with really good teams; that they don't keep throwing in losing-record teams from Power Five conferences; that the mid-majors are very good.

And I don't consider ourselves a mid-major. I think we're a high-major program.

Q. The game could have looked a lot different if nine of those free throws fell. What was going through your head as some of those free throws glanced off the rim?

COACH DUTCHER: Just have to trust in your routine. We made enough to win. Obviously you want to make them all. They missed a couple of timely ones, too.

And that's basketball. That's pressure. That's game on the line, step up and make them. It's hard to do. It's easy to say. It's never the same as shooting 100 on your own in the gym. You shoot it in the stadium with the game on the line, those are hard to make.

Q. Down the stretch of last week's game against Creighton, you went away from Matt Bradley. What does that say for him to come in today, have the type of impact he had?

COACH DUTCHER: I put on the board again: Be fearless. And he was fearless. He was going to shoot himself into this game. The first one went in. That always makes you feel good to see the first one go in, and then he got rolling.

He's a dangerous offensive player. He can create his own shot. And he's a very good passer too. It was good to see Matt rolling.

Q. What did you think when you guys got down by 14? It's been kind of a theme at least lately for you guys. Were you confident as they were and what did you say to them in the huddle at that point?

COACH DUTCHER: I just kept telling them even at halftime that Florida Atlantic plays how they play. They're up-tempo, they're fast, they're going to take open shots.

I didn't feel as they were going to try to slow the game down and grind it out. I knew they would continue to play aggressive basketball.

And thank goodness for us they missed a few shots and we got a few stops and got back in the game.

Q. Going back to Lamont, can you kind of recall what you remember about him during your time recruiting him as a player before he came to San Diego State?

COACH DUTCHER: Lamont Butler was the all-time leading scorer at his high school, Long Beach Poly, and Reggie Miller played there. So I don't need to tell you that he can put it in the basket. We knew what we were getting with Lamont, getting a leader, a tough hard-nosed kid, and he has the ability to score the ball when he needs to.

Q. When you scored that 2 with, whatever, 37 seconds left, do you consider fouling there with that little time left when you're going to get it back?

COACH DUTCHER: I think with a seven-second differential, I thought we'd have enough time to get up the floor. Usually you get one dribble per second if you're going up the floor. So I figured we had enough time to get six or seven dribbles to head up the floor. I don't know how many he took, but it was probably close to that.

Q. Your father started coaching in 1966 here at Eastern Michigan; here you are in the national championship game. What do you think it means to him and just to be a part of that coaching tree to get to this national championship game?

COACH DUTCHER: I know he's proud of me, like any father would be proud of his son. I'm happy he got to watch it. Hopefully he can be here Monday for the game. He's a little under the weather. I told him we're going to win, Dad, so you can come in for the championship. Hopefully that happens.

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