

March 24, 2011



Connecticut - 74
San Diego State – 67

An interview with:



COACH CALHOUN: Well, you know, obviously it was a great basketball game. In the first half I thought we were able to eventually take away their post-up game reasonably well, and rebound very well, and kinda settle into the fact that they were switching all the high screen and rolls and doubling Kemba and Jeremy, so I felt good at halftime.

When we came out the second half one of my fears has been that somewhere along the line that psychic energy, this is now our 8th game in 16 days, or something, but not physically, but mentally, and we had a let-up, and we got up 7, 8 or 9, and they came back.

Last time our team faced a crowd, was up in Oakland against UCLA, and it was reminiscent of that. That crowd, as I said yesterday, someone said, "Will the crowd affect you?" And I said "No, but it will affect the "home" team." And that crowd jumped on them and gave them energy and I was worried about our energy.

But then we made some terrific, terrific plays and, you know, we were able to get a good win. They're obviously a very talented basketball team. We've faced other teams like them this year, not necessarily how they're built, but from a talent level, they could certainly play in all the major conferences in the country and there is a reason they won 34 games. They have good players, and Steve does a great job with them.

Our biggest problem tonight was the post-up game which we had a tough time with in the second half when they made their run at us, but it was a great game and we're forty minutes away from where we want to be, and whether we face Duke or Arizona, they will want to be there badly. So it will be a heck of a fight over forty minutes to get to Houston.

Q. Kemba, Coach was talking about a little bit of a not physical let down but maybe mental, tiredness? You play in less than 48 hours again coming up for the championship. What are your thoughts about that, and how do you overcome that kind of thing?

KEMBA WALKER: We won five games in five days in the Big East tournament, and everybody said we were going to be tired. After that, everybody said it was going to affect us in the second and third round of the tournament and it hasn't yet. We're playing great basketball as a team. We have something huge in front of us. We have a huge goal as a team, and we're not going to let fatigue beat us. We're going to overcome it. We have a team that is extremely mentally tough, and that's going to get us over the hump.

Q. Kemba, it seemed like they were trying to be very, very physical with you. Did you feel they were trying to make a point in addition to trying to win a game?

KEMBA WALKER: Definitely. I felt that they were trying to frustrate me, but I didn't fall into it. I just played basketball, and I was able to make a couple of shots.

Q. Kemba, how big of a swing were the two technicals called on them, and can you walk us through on what happened when you were hit?

KEMBA WALKER: I was walking on my way to the huddle and one of their players ran into me. That was it. But the two free-throws was definitely big. I think we were down 4 at that point,

and I made the free-throws, put us down 2, and from there we just built.

Q. Kemba, I think you know Jamaal a little bit from the a visit at UCONN. That's what he said. Was the contact enough to go down? Does it matter at that point, because you got what you wanted out of it? You got the free-throws.

KEMBA WALKER: The contact was definitely enough to go down. That's why I was able to get the free-throws.

Q. Kemba, your a pretty good shooter, first time I've seen you out here.

KEMBA WALKER: Thanks.

Q. How much did you want that ball when it comes down to crunch time? And Jeremy, talk about playing in front of that "home" crowd in front of San Diego State.

KEMBA WALKER: As far as big shots my teammates want me to take those shots, everybody on the team, coaching staff they want me to take those shots. So as long as they have the confidence in me to take it I'm going to take it with confidence.

Q. Jeremy, the defense that you did on D.J. and Kawhi, you guys in the first half played them well. Can you talk about that and how you were able to accomplish that?

JEREMY LAMB: We went over the scouting report and our coaches went over what they like to do and their tendencies, and they got us prepared for them. We just tried to listen and be in position, you know, do as well as we can to stop what they like to do and just contest all shots. Once it leaves their hands nobody can control it. So we just tried to disrupt it, and we were able to do that.

Q. Kemba, you've been watching the arc for Jeremy all season. Do you feel like career high of 24, 9 out of 11, this is a high water mark for him? And Jeremy, do you feel like you have arrived in the place where you exported to get to by the end of the season?

KEMBA WALKER: As far as that, no, Jeremy has been playing some great basketball for us, you know, for a long time how. I know it's a big stage but he's had 24 before. Jeremy had one stretch in the beginning of the season where he was unstoppable. So as far as that, no. I'm happy

he had a big game, though, because we definitely needed it from him.

JEREMY LAMB: I don't know where I expected myself to be, but right now I'm just trying to play hard and I get easy shots playing off Kemba because if they don't throw two or three people at him he's going to make 'em pay and teams know that. So I get open shots and all I can do is try to knock 'em down and today I was able to do that.

Q. Kemba, Kawhi's first technical he said he was talking back and forth with a UCONN player. Did you see what happened on that play?

KEMBA WALKER: Wasn't me.

Q. Jeremy, did you see what happened?

JEREMY LAMB: No, I didn't see.

Q. I want to know your feelings about being 3,000 miles away from home and coming out here and facing basically a home team, to overcome that.

KEMBA WALKER: We play in the Big East, best league in the country, hands down, and we had some pretty tough road games during the season. We went to Texas, got a "W" out there. We're used to it.

But the fans didn't affect us as much as people think. We had a great fan base, also, so it wasn't as much of a problem as people think.

Q. Kemba, the resilience of San Diego State, you went on a run, put 'em down by 9, they came back, you went on another run, they came back, can you talk about that?

KEMBA WALKER: Yeah, they're a team that stays with their things and they play extremely hard the whole game and that was able to keep those guys in the game.

Q. Jeremy, at the end of the game it looked like you had your arm around the trainer and he was helping you off, was that dehydration or from the shot you took after the dunk?

JEREMY LAMB: I was running down the court and got hit by a screen. I was walking and he just came and put my arm around him, it wasn't anything serious. He's our trainer, so he was like

"Are you okay? Are you okay?" But I was all right.

Q. Kemba, yesterday you said during the news conference that you were going to have a big game whether it be off scoring or assists if they threw the kitchen sink at you, which they did, when did you know it was going to be putting the ball in the hole?

KEMBA WALKER: I don't know. I struggled early in the first half, but all my shots felt good. I was just missing them. In the second half I was able to get composure, calm down and my teammates did a great job of getting me open, and I was able to make shots.

Q. Jeremy can you talk about playing with Kemba and does anything he ever does surprise you?

JEREMY LAMB: Early in the season it surprised me, but I'm still amazed by stuff he does, but I'm not surprised. Every game he makes big shots, amazing shots. So I'm not surprised, but I'm still amazed.

Q. Jeremy, great game. Talk to us about the play where you made the steal near the end and then Shabazz was nice enough to give you that dunk?

JEREMY LAMB: I knew somebody was open behind me and he telegraphed the pass and I was able to steal it. When I passed it up, I thought he was going to finish the layup, but he passed it back, and I was able to finish it.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, gentlemen.

Q. Coach, can you talk about your concerns on the match-ups in your next game for either side?

COACH CALHOUN: Well, I was concerned about our match-ups today. A lot of times we play Jeremy at the 3, Shabazz at 5-10 at the point and Kemba at 6, although he's 185 pounds he can usually play anybody. So we were concerned about the match-ups today.

If you play Duke, they have two kids that are an integral part of the team last year, they have the finest coach in the country, and Arizona reminds me of San Diego State, in the sense that they have a terrific, terrific group of athletes.

So we will get mismatched a little bit and our idea is to take advantage of our quickness, and if you had that lull, and you don't win 34 games without having resiliency, but we had a lull by

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throwing the ball in bounds, giving up two three's late. It's hard to beat a team that has that many good players, but for right now for me to start worrying about the match-up when I don't know who we're playing is difficult.

I know Duke very well. We've met them a lot of times in the Final Four, late shot against us, not that I remember, in 1990, so we've had a lot of runs with Mike, when I was in Northeastern and Mike was at Army we had a lot of runs.

Sean Miller was a player at Pittsburgh when I was coaching against them, and he's developed into a terrific coach and they have terrific players and, you know what, we would be happy to play anybody for forty minutes to get to Houston.

Q. Jim, a comment on this unprecedented, incredible run you've been on in the postseason, 8 straight, where you were, and how you've gotten to where you are now?

COACH CALHOUN: By the way, one thing about Jeremy, I appreciate you not talking to him. How many guys get 24 points in a Sweet 16 and give all the credit to somebody else, we would like to keep him for a couple more years, so cool it. He's humble. Let's keep him that way. I keep telling Jeremy, you have so many more things that you can do. You can get strength and maybe a couple of years down the road you might be able to play at the next level. So we're going to chill with all those comments.

By the way, that reach is 7-4, so when he says he just got the pass, when you're 7-4 reach allows you to do a little bit better.

This run has been sensational in many, many ways. I haven't been able to yet put it in perspective. I will tell you this: That I've mention this, and I don't want to keep going back to it, but I've had two tough personal situations with my sister-in-law, who I loved like a sister, and I have five of those, and my college roommate who I was like a brother with, and a lot of things that happened along the way, and I couldn't have asked for a better gift than this team.

And then we get this, the Big East championship, and coaching these kids and the pledge of resiliency that they have, we had one of our best practices of the year when we lost to Notre Dame, we lost three out of four before getting to the Big East tournament. I don't remember being through anything quite like this, and I've had a team with 5 pros on it, and we went

to the Final Four and all of that.

But this is a team that truly plays together, and I hate to say this but they're an old-fashioned team, when you talk to Kemba and Jeremy, they're old-fashioned kids, which gives you pleasure, because you aren't coaching egos. I've had great kids at UCONN, and by no means do I mean to disparage any of the kids I've had, but this team with the youth and the 7 freshmen, it's so great.

Could I imagine this? Yeah, because we had talent. There were a couple of times we looked like it and then a couple we didn't, and then we came together in the tournament; and as you said, we're on an eight-game streak of playing good basketball because San Diego State can really play.

Q. You were talking a little bit yesterday about reflecting and you have Jeremy Lamb who helps you in this game and have you thought about going back to Northeastern and his father helps beat you and knock you out and now his son helps you advance?

COACH CALHOUN: I called the house -- after seeing Jeremy play in something called the Peach Tournament in Georgetown, and he was the M.V.P. there, and he was so thin and this microphone could have scored 13 points against him, and I said, Hello, is Jeremy there? No, this is Orlando. Excuse me, who? Orlando, and I said Orlando Lamb. You owe me something. Your son and we started talk about that B.C. game when I was at Northeastern.

So, yeah, it's ironic, and there is something ironic about this whole situation, and I couldn't be more thrilled as a coach. The way things have happened having somebody like Jeremy whose mother and father are great people. He can't help it, but be a good kid and he is very talented, too.

Q. Given that you've had so many games in so many days, have you changed things, physically, to save them?

COACH CALHOUN: I've lied better to them. At times they think they're going just as hard, but they're going much shorter, and we make sure that there isn't a lot of clocks because we have -- you guys don't do this for a living without understanding that you can only push so hard.

So we've done a lot of things. This morning what we do for our shootaround which is atypical for us. We ate breakfast, moved to the hall next door, went through the offense and the

defense, and things we wanted to do; and I wouldn't have done that under normal situations, but we have to do that. It's a lot of basketball.

I keep telling them, if you give in physically -- you can't. You play basketball every single day of your life so what's different about what we're doing now? But inside I worry about, can they draw their emotion like they had to tonight when San Diego State came back at us.

So we're trying to do different things. We went bowling the other night -- I didn't! And we have some awful bowlers, I will report that. But we're trying to do different things. We always take 'em out to eat. We will do that tomorrow night and Friday night, bottom line is -- we try and change a few things up.

Q. You touched a little bit on Jeremy, the player, but the last -- I think it was a minute 40, it was after Kemba's game, it was like his last minute and 40, could you talk about Jeremy as the clutch player at the end? He did it twice in the Big East Tournament and tonight, the play at the end has been great.

COACH CALHOUN: It has been, and I'll be honest with you, Jeff, that I don't think he worries about that. One of the great things -- sometimes you get kids who all of the sudden have aspirations, these illusions, and I always thought Butler was a great player for us for two years because Caron was with us today. He didn't think about what was coming up. Jeremy has no idea, and I really mean this, just how good he is, and he can be really, really good, he could be great. I think that's allowed him to play as a freshman for the team and not worry about anything ulcer else and a shot to him is a shot to him, and he reminds me of Richard Hamilton, because they remind me of each other, there are players who take shots, they don't think about whether it's 30 seconds or 30 minutes, I don't think it changes the way he plays the game. It's not unusual. He's a bright kid, but I don't think he gets caught up in all of that.

Q. Coach, you mentioned that was like the UCLA game in Oakland, but you've had Elite Eights in D.C. against George Mason and in Greensboro against North Carolina, both times you didn't come out with a win. Where does this rank in terms of facing a road environment in the NCAA Tournament?

COACH CALHOUN: Probably -- I'm glad you reminded me. This crowd was as good as any, and San Diego State I'm sure will thank their fans. They were wonderful for their team. You're 100% right the George Mason crowd, and we played that on George Mason's campus, if I remember correctly, and they beat us in overtime and went to Final Four.

So this momentum that swung to San Diego State late with us combined by making a few mistakes showed as much resiliency as probably any basketball team, and it's comparable, I don't mind saying this, we were down seven points to Duke and they had a ball with a minute 58 to go and we won the game in regulation, and in the semifinal we went on to beat Georgia Tech big in the national championship. This would be somewhat close to that, the numbers not as big, but the crowd made it seem that all of the sudden they went up 10 when they went up a couple, and I think the resiliency and the heart this team displayed has been phenomenal.

We talk as coaches about chemistry, right before your eyes you're seeing a bunch of young guys who truly believe in each other and that's a common myth, and I have them believing that no one gave them any respect early which is true and you have to earn respect all along the way, and they've done that.

Q. Coach, Kemba has proven virtually unflappable all season, so I'm sure you don't worry about him when he misses his first four shots, but do you worry about his teammates' mind-set when he misses a few in a row and what enabled him to reach that second gear tonight?

COACH CALHOUN: He always reaches the second gear and always had, the last time he didn't was in the Michigan State game when he was a freshman in the Final Four and he couldn't get anything going.

But I'll be honest with you, it's kind of funny, there is a little interplay up here. You asked both Kemba and Jeremy a question and all of the sudden I heard "I've got it first." You guys might have heard the same thing, and that's how they look at him. Without being -- he's a friend, they love him and they follow him, and if he misses they don't worry about that, they really don't. They believe in him as much as I do. How many times have I said to them, we're going to run this out-of-bounds, make sure you get the damn ball. They know how I feel about him.

I don't think they're affected when he misses. I think they would be affected -- if all of the sudden he wasn't telling them things, you see him walking off the court, wasn't lively. That's when I think they would be affected the most, not missing shots.

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