

# Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Friday March 6, 2020

## Brian Dutcher

## Matt Mitchell

## KJ Feagin

## Malachi Flynn

## San Diego State Aztecs

San Diego State - 81, Boise State - 68

THE MODERATOR: Let's start with an opening statement from coach.

BRIAN DUTCHER: First of all, I want to say thank you to Aztec Nation. We travel better than anybody and it makes a huge difference. When we got behind tonight the crowd got behind us when we made a little run. And I imagine we'll have another two or three thousand making the trip for tomorrow's game. So I want to thank all the Aztec fans for supporting us the way they do and it makes a difference.

I want to say congratulations to Boise. I mean, they rocked us on our heels in the first half. We got off to a good start, made some shots, and then they went on an incredible run on us. I don't know what the lead was, 16 points, something like that, 14, 16 points. And just shows what kind of team I have with great resolve, they didn't panic, they just fought their way back into it, tied it at halftime, and then it was a very competitive second half. And I've got good players and they make me look like a good coach many a night.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach. Let's take questions for the student-athletes, please.

**Q. KJ, you dropped 21 tonight. Did today kind of feel like what you did against Boise a couple months ago in Viejas? And can you also talk about the 19-3 run to kind of claw your way back, you guys back from the 16-point deficit in the first half?**

KJ FEAGIN: Today definitely felt like our game against Boise at Viejas. I got going in that game. And in this game, I got going early as well and I didn't slow down. But the 19-3 run in the first half was a big momentum boost for us. And after we tied it at halftime, you guys saw how pumped up we were at halftime, and I knew that we weren't going to lose after that. So we got into halftime, we made our adjustments, and we were ready



to go out and just unleash after that.

**Q. Matt, how much of a factor was KJ's leadership tonight?**

MATT MITCHELL: It was a very big factor. He was a leader, vocal. He showed it as well. So that's what, as he's done all year. That's nothing new to us. So he did an excellent job leading us tonight and taking over in that first half and taking over in the second half and making tough shots. And I'm just happy to have him on the team.

**Q. Malachi, have you guys kind of have given up on the whole we're going to have a fast start thing because it's kind of working for you just to fall behind and come roaring back?**

MALACHI FLYNN: No, I think we did a good job getting off to a good start today, especially the first couple minutes and they just went on their own run. And then that's just how it goes. Basketball's a game of runs and eventually it's going to turn our way.

**Q. KJ?**

KJ FEAGIN: Just beating a team three times is hard and like you said, we got off to a great start, but basketball is a game of runs and teams are going to hit shots. And we're not perfect as well and we made some mistakes that they capitalized on. So it's just that time of the year where every other team is kind of hitting their stride so the ante is getting upped a little bit. But we're resilient and we're a talented team so we know that we're going to get everybody's extra best shot at this point. So they came out and they were pumped and ready for the game, but we had a better punch at the end.

**Q. Matt, you guys are going back to the championship game tomorrow. What's the emotion like knowing you can kind of avenge what happened last year, obviously, the disappointment last year and potentially against Utah State again.**

MATT MITCHELL: Well, being on this team for the third year and having what happened last year, I definitely want to get back and get back at Utah State and get that win. No matter who it is, Wyoming, Utah State, whoever wins, I think we definitely want to win that championship. It's no doubt about it. No, I definitely want it for myself, I want it for this team. I mean, I just want to avenge it.

**Q. KJ, what were they doing defensively that was maybe a little bit different from other games? It looked like they were really gapping up and taking away the paint and that opened things up for you on the perimeter?**

KJ FEAGIN: To be honest, I didn't really notice anything differently defensively. Offensively, I felt like we got any look that we wanted. We just weren't hitting shots at one point in the game and the reason they made that run was just on the other end of the floor. I don't think offense is ever a problem for us at this point in the season. So to say I saw any adjustments, I don't think I saw that. But maybe I'll look at film and see something else, but right off the top of my head I don't think I saw any.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. We'll dismiss the athletes and take questions for coach.

**Q. You held them to 23 percent shooting in the second half. What were some of the defensive adjustments you made at halftime?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I don't know if they shot that low. I haven't looked. I thought they were higher than that. But, no, we just got out of our help positions. They were doing a great job gapping up on us and we needed to gap up better on them so we needed to shrink the floor where they didn't have as many lanes to drive to the basket. We didn't want to switch as many ball screens, even though we ended up doing it, because they were rolling us in with a big and posting us and causing us issues there. They had a good game plan, they executed it and we were very fortunate to come out and get a victory tonight.

**Q. In the first or in the last game at Boise you switched almost everything. And this one it didn't look like you were switching as much early, but what was the thinking behind that change?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: We switched everything at the very start because that's what we had success with the other game. But when they were rolling us into the post, they were throwing over us, they were posting us up, scoring in the low post, so we tried not to switch as much. And as much as we tried not to, there were times in the game where we still switched. And so sometimes that's good, sometimes you switch, sometimes you don't switch and they don't know what you're doing. And sometimes we don't know what we're doing. But it found a way to work out. So we didn't want to switch as much the second half, we did at times, but I thought we did a better job not letting them go in the low post on us in the second half.

**Q. Could you talk about the back court duo of KJ and Malachi, they combined for 43. And just, for**

**most of that game, it seemed like they were the only ones in double digits. Could you talk about what they meant to the offense?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I thought KJ had a really good first half. I mean, he drove into traffic in the first half and hit a really couple hard shots, right at the front of the rim. So those were really hard finishes for him, but they were timely. And we made I think three threes to start the game. But when we started missing them we couldn't all of a sudden say, well we're missing threes, we'll just drive in and get layups. We were getting threes because they were packed in the paint. So eventually we kept shooting them, kept shooting them and then we started making some again. So they forced us into shooting threes, so Malachi would come off a ball screen, they collapse in the paint, and he kicked the ball out and then we had to make the shot. And to the credit of our guys they made a lot of threes in the second half, maybe 15 for the game, high for the year. So that's what they were giving us, that's what we had to take.

**Q. Is there any chance this team ever becomes a little too reliant on the three or is that not even a concern with these guys the way you collectively shoot?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I mean, it's all based on how we're guarded. I mean, they weren't going to give us anything but threes. There was no room to the basket, they were packed in there, and so we took some threes. Later in the game Matt got to the basket a couple of times, Malachi on a ball screen, and that's as much a byproduct as we made some threes and now they're nervous, so it pulls them away. But at some point we have to make threes in order to stretch the floor. And so if we stretch it and all of a sudden they're nervous, then that's when we go inside to Yanni and let him try to score in the low post because they don't want to give threes up.

**Q. What qualities does a team need to continue to come back in these games that you're down and ultimately go 29-1, 30-1?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Confidence and talent, swagger, belief. They never think they're out of a game. There's never an over reaction in a timeout even when we're down 16. They just keep chipping away and playing with great confidence. And if you don't have confidence you have no chance and this team has great confidence.

**Q. Along those same lines, what's your comfort level now on the sidelines that you've been through this five straight games where teams shoot 50 plus in the first half, you fall behind by eight, 10, 14 tonight. Are you just like, Oh, okay, it's happened again, we're going to win, or are you nervous?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: I mean, you're always nervous as a coach, you're trying to find something that works, something you can go to. And obviously we always go to ball screens with Malachi. Sometimes we don't go to them as early as we did in the game, try to get everybody involved, get them touching the ball, run some stuff for other guys. But when we got down that many I just at that point said, Let's put it in our best player's hands and let him make plays for everybody. And that's the beauty of Malachi. A lot of guards you put in that position they're going to shoot it every time you call their number. And all he does is tell people where he wants them, comes off the ball screen and he finds them. And then if they make a mistake or they duck under and he feels like he wants to shoot a three, he raises up and takes it. So you put it in your best player's hands and you let him make plays for everyone else.

**Q. What are the emotions coming into tomorrow with the championship game and how do you balance that with your team, knowing what happened last year, and how do you kind of tell them it's a new year and how do you guys deal with all that?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: It's a different feeling than last year, even though it's still the championship game. Last year we weren't going to the NCAA tournament unless we won it. This year we know we're going to the NCAA tournament. So it's just another feather in our cap, we can cut nets down again, but we're focused beyond tomorrow night, we're focused two weeks from now when the NCAA tournament starts. So, yeah, we want to win it in the worse way, but there's not the same feeling as last year where it was, if we don't win, our season ends.

**Q. Is that confidence that you mentioned different than teams past, because you've had really talented teams before and obviously they haven't been 29-1.**

BRIAN DUTCHER: 30-1. No, no, we have had teams with great confidence, I mean the 34-3 team with D.J., Kawhi Leonard, Malcolm, Billy, that team had great swagger and confidence. And that comes from winning. So the winning and the confidence go together. Sometimes they can rock you and lose a couple games in a row and it might slip a little bit. But that's why coaches, you have to keep their team believing in themselves through hard times too. So Aztec basketball has always had a strong belief that we're good and that we can get better. We never just think we have arrived. So as good as we're playing now, we think there's another level we can play at and we have to try to get there tomorrow and then in the eight to 10 days leading into the NCAA tournament we have to raise our level of play.

**Q. You guys have are the first team to win 30 games. Just having a 30-win season that's remarkable in itself. You still have work to do, but just reflecting on that accomplishment what does that mean for you?**

BRIAN DUTCHER: Like I said, I reflect on it when the season's over. Right now I'm focused on Utah State and Wyoming. I'm going to go back and watch both of our last games, both, against both opponents, and try to get ready for tomorrow, where we have our best chance to win our next game. And we're looking forward to that, to that environment, to this building being full of Aztec fans and trying to take advantage of all those things to try to cut nets down again.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time, coach.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Thank you.