

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Colorado State Rams

Coach Niko Medved

Nique Clifford

Jalen Lake

Postgame Press Conference

Colorado State 69, Boise State 56

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. Nique, how does it feel to have a piece of this net after some of the prediction, the doubts at the start of the year?

NIQUE CLIFFORD: It's awesome. That's what you work for all year. They picked us seventh. That's something we took part in and we wanted to prove everyone wrong. It feels super sweet to be able to do so.

Q. Jalen, you're the longest tenured player up there. What does it feel like to finally get it done?

JALEN LAKE: I'm just so thankful, one, for my teammates here and Coach Medved and everybody that's been a part of this journey. Through the ups and downs, I feel I stayed focused and kept with it. And just to go dancing and be at the top and win the Mountain West tournament is unreal. I can't put into words. It's a blessing. I'm thankful.

Q. Ethan, I don't know if there's someone more hyped than you as the final buzzer is going off. Who did you go up to in the stands to hug? What does it mean to go dancing?

ETHAN MORTON: You're going to make me cry, man. I get emotional. I did the same thing in high school. I went up and found my parents, the parents' section and giving them a hug because they've been my rock steady through all the stuff. I've been through a lot in my career, experienced a lot of stuff.

As these guys can attest, it wasn't always easy this year.



They stuck with me and I'm so appreciative to everybody in here and in the locker room. It's unbelievable. It's hard to put into words. So appreciative, man. That's it.

Q. Ethan, kind of to follow that, what did it mean to you? You came here to have a role in a team doing big things. What did it mean to have this performance in this game?

ETHAN MORTON: Man, just a blessing. Just thank you, God, for letting me do that today. Just glad to help this team win. I think if you can say one thing about me and my career, been through a lot of stuff, haven't always been great. But the one thing you can say is I'm a winner.

I'm just happy to win no matter what it takes. I play 5, I play 30. I score zero, I score 10. No matter what it is, I just want to win. That's what this group embodies. I'm thankful to be part of a group of guys who makes it so easy to play the game.

Q. How does it feel to go from where you were in November and December to wearing the hats?

NIQUE CLIFFORD: It's, I feel like, God's plan. Like I said before, we needed to go through some of that adversity and some of those tough times early on in the season because I feel like that built us up, made us stronger, and come together more.

People didn't believe in us. They doubted us. We stuck together, continued to work every single day and trusted in Coach's plan and seen the vision the whole year.

I think we just worked towards that and it's finally came true. So it's surreal.

Q. CSU hasn't won this tournament for 22 years. You guys probably weren't lan playing basketball then. What does it feel like to be part of CSU history in that way.

JALEN LAKE: This is what we talked about, just coming here and making history. It's awesome. It's a blessing just



to be able to cut the net down and do all those things that you see, even growing up, and just to win it, win the Mountain West, is a blessing.

Q. Just how rewarding was this performance, given everybody kind of played a little piece in it. Bowen Born goes 3 for 3. Crock gets a bunch of shots.

NIQUE CLIFFORD: It's a testament to our team, as I said yesterday in the interview. Like, our team is so versatile. And you seen that firsthand tonight. So many guys step up, make big plays, and it doesn't matter who gets the credit. We're all unselfish and we just want to win at the end of the day, like Ethan said. To see guys step up like Ethan, Bowen, Ke, coming in the game, it's big time.

Q. Was there a moment for you guys where it felt like something clicked and something changed for this team?

JALEN LAKE: I mean, I feel like just looking back, I remember Coach Medved saying before Christmas break, you know, this is where teams get better. We make -- everybody makes the biggest jump around the Christmas break, and we really took that to heart and went in to work every day.

We didn't look into the future. We didn't look behind us. We just kept focusing, trying to get better, what we could do each and every day. It just shows, we showed so much growth from top down. It awesome.

THE MODERATOR: Going to dismiss the players at this time. Thank you.

Q. Niko, first win for you in this league after coming close with some really good teams. What are you feeling like right now?

NIKO MEDVED: It's surreal. What an incredible story. I mean, this team, the legacy of this team is going to live on forever. It's a great story, just for people. Resilience and staying together and believing in something bigger than yourself. Like these guys said, not getting ahead of yourself and just going to work.

When you believe in that and believe in the process, great things can happen. It's been that way, I think, forever. Sometimes people lose sight of that. Just to see it happen and manifest the way that it did. It's crazy, like, they just keep getting better.

Every time I ask them for more, they just find a way to give it. Yeah, they're just, they're so unselfish. They're just a joy to be around and I'm so proud of them.

Q. Bench stepped up for you tonight pretty early, scored your first 15 points, 28 overall. The same two guys you talked about yesterday, going for that loose ball, provided that spark. What can you say about that group?

NIKO MEDVED: Those two guys, the tears in their eyes. I remember coming here, Bowen had had an opportunity to play in the NCAA Tournament and had been a go-to guy in Northern Iowa. He said he'd take any role he could get. Ethan, the same way.

Those two embody the team. It's crazy. We knew today Bowen didn't have his best game last night. He's played big for us. Those two guys are the guys that sparked it, to be honest. They came in. We were down 6-0. Their energy changed everything. That guy there said, I'm coming here for my last year. I'm not going to not go to the tournament. I've been in the tournament every year for Purdue. To see it happen for that young man and for Bowen, who's never been there, it's what it's all about.

Q. Every off-season, you're trying to build a winner like this. There's uncertainty until you get the whole group together on how they'll react, those intangible things. When did you realize this group had the intangible buy-in that this could be that type of group?

NIKO MEDVED: I sensed it in the summer as far as who they were and their willingness to buy into what we were asking them to do. We were a work in progress. We were broken on offense. Guys trying to find their roles, figure out our system.

Then us as coaches learning them, and there's a process for the coaches to figure out how can we make this group the best version of themselves. Again, the story that they say is over Christmas break, that's when it changed.

I'm a believer in that. Sometimes you have to go through the losses and the tough times and the adversity to get to -- that's where the most growth happens. And oh, man, if you hadn't lost that game early. But we did. Maybe we needed to -- you know what I mean? -- to figure things out.

It's just a testament to these guys and it's a great life lesson for everyone.

Q. I remember you saying earlier this season that you want your teams to play with joy. How have they done that this season and do you think it's impacted your win?

NIKO MEDVED: 100 percent. Don't get me into my joy



rant or whatever because these guys have heard it and it's a special thing and something really deep and spiritual in people.

It's a lot different than happiness. They do, they've embodied that. They've found that in themselves. And it's something that it's hard to describe to people. We talk about it a lot. But they had found that, and it's really kind of, I think, what fuels them and this team.

Q. Winning is always fun. You guys have been to the tournament a couple times. Have you ever been a part of anything like this ten-game stretch here? Is it more rewarding than some of the other ones?

NIKO MEDVED: Yeah, you know, there's been a lot of great teams and stories. But this is incredibly special. I just think even when the dust settles, people will look at this and go oh, my goodness, you know. It's not just that we won. It's kind of how we've done it. You know what I mean? We keep coming and coming and coming and playing better and better and better.

Who they are as people, to do it with this group, I told the team this morning and at halftime, I said there's no place I'd rather be right now than with you guys in this moment that you've earned. When you look around the room, they all felt the same way.

Q. Still being written, still more games to be played, but what is Nique Clifford's CSU legacy?

NIKO MEDVED: He's an all-time great. He really is. It's hard. You start saying that stuff now, and thinking about it. I think the dust needs to settle on it, but he's one of the best to ever do it here. Just look at how he's grown and gotten better and how he's led us this season in so many big moments.

His performance at Boise, you know, last game of the regular season, his performance in this tournament. It's really been incredible, and he does it in such an unselfish manner.

Q. Coach, for the guys like Bowen Born, Ethan Morton, you know, what does it mean to be able to play one more game with them and give them another opportunity to step up?

NIKO MEDVED: It's awesome. Again, just like they came here to do this and to have that happen for these young guys is just, again, it's a storybook kind of thing.

I agree, we're not done yet. It's going to be an exciting day tomorrow to find out where we get to go play. We won't be

in Dayton this year. And it's going to be awesome. Selection Sunday is going to be really special. I want these guys to enjoy every single moment of it and not focus on everything else. Then we'll turn our attention right away to whoever we play. We're going to enjoy the heck out of this right now. They've earned it.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thank you.

NIKO MEDVED: Thank you.

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