

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Friday, March 14, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Boise State Broncos

Leon Rice

Emmanuel Ugbo

Tyson Degenhart

Postgame Press Conference



EMMANUEL UGBO: It's great. The game is really a confidence thing. If you know you have a coach that's going to support you, even though you make mistakes, because I didn't play perfect. I still made mistakes, and Coach kept on encouraging me and telling me, "You're doing good. Keep going. Take a deep breath. You're fine." That just makes it so much easier.

Boise State Broncos 72, New Mexico Lobos 69

LEON RICE: The world gets to see what I see, and what I see is a bunch of guys that are just built differently, as far as they can face adversity, they face adversity and they don't fold. We have three guys with four fouls. Just couldn't really get in a good flow, a good groove, and we just keep trying to find a way and find a way. You know, stay in the moment and make the big plays in the moment.

So credit to these guys. Emms did some amazing things, stepped up, and because O'Mar had a ton of fouls and a ton of fouls quickly. Emms picked a perfect time for a special -- but it doesn't surprise any of us. Because we've seen a lot of our guys at their best. We know what they can do and that's how you have to be playing when you come into a tournament like this.

Everybody's got to be playing their best, because you're playing good teams, and we just played another one tonight.

Q. Emmanuel, you got career highs in minutes and points tonight. After O'Mar gets into some foul trouble, how do you approach this, and how are you staying ready instead of getting ready?

EMMANUEL UGBO: I just want to thank my teammates and coaches for trusting me. They tell me to stay ready. They have seen what I can do in practices and games before. Today, I just let it rip. Like Coach always says, be ready, because you never know when your chance is going to come, and today was my chance and I took it.

Q. You mentioned it, but how big was it for Coach to have confidence in you in that moment?

Q. Take me through that stretch with Andrew when he hits that three, he goes 1-for-8 before that point and he gets that touchdown pass dunk. How big was that stretch for you guys?

TYSON DEGENHART: That was a huge play. We practiced that one before and came through a perfect pass, Andrew got behind his defender, Keene threw it in front of him and he got it for a dunk.

Getting those two points is huge in a game that's so close. That was huge momentum play for us.

Q. The team's defense in key moments; how did you handle New Mexico's offensive threats?

TYSON DEGENHART: It was a team effort. We knew it wasn't going to be easy to stop their offense with it being so prolific, and I'm just really, really proud of our group. We really came together on a short turnaround, and we were able to get it done.

Q. Four years ago, you came to this tournament as a true freshman with a special team and win the whole thing. What does it mean to be in the position to play for a Mountain West Tournament Championship tomorrow?

TYSON DEGENHART: It's the greatest feeling. You know, winning it my freshman year, just got a taste of it. And ever since then, I've just wanted to get back and win it again. This will be my last go-around, and there's nothing better to be in the Mountain West Championship Game and having an opportunity to go out with these guys with a win. Very excited for it.



Q. Four years ago, you were the young guy helping the team. What did you think of E-Man tonight? That was insane.

TYSON DEGENHART: Once I saw the first one go in for him, I knew it was going to be a good night. He made some timely shots and timely plays and was really, really big for us. He was plus 12 in 24 minutes. That's big time. I'm really real lid proud of him because he works so hard and just seeing the reaping of his work.

Q. How deep does the team need to dig? Three guys with four fouls, five minutes to go, and you had to get production from sources that you haven't got all season usually but just how deep do you guys have to dig?

TYSON DEGENHART: We had to dig deep. There were stretches where it kind of felt like the world was saving in on us. The crowd was really, really good for New Mexico. It was just a testament to this team and just sticking together because we knew there's going to be runs in this game, and we knew it wasn't going to be over until the last whistle blew. Just really, really proud of our effort.

Q. What does it mean to have the school record in career points now?

TYSON DEGENHART: If someone told me that four years ago in the middle of November, I would have told you, you're crazy.

It's just a testament to my coaches, my teammates, my friends, my family, just believing in me the whole time. I'm very, very thankful.

Q. Like you mentioned, you don't know when your night is going to be called. What does it mean for you?

EMMANUEL UGBO: I'm so happy. I want to give a special shout out to Pablo, I was on the phone with him before the game. He played with me for five to ten minutes, and God came through this game for me. I'm just so happy that we put away this win, and then we have one more to go tomorrow.

Q. The bench has meant so much to the team, but the last couple games collectively you've been quiet. How much did you take it upon yourselves to make sure the bench impacted this game?

EMMANUEL UGBO: Our coaches always make it very evident that we've all got to be ready, and it's all of us, and

it's not going to take just Tyson.

So we just knew we got to be ready, and whenever our name get called, that we have to go in there and step up. The coaches trust us to go in there and make a difference, and I think we did a good job of that today.

Q. RJ, too, such a typical RJ stat. Ten rebounds. What did you see out of RJ tonight, impacting the game defensively?

TYSON DEGENHART: He's our glue guy, and without him, I don't think we win this game. I mean, three offensive rebounds and had seven defensive. He made some big plays.

I don't know if they counted the tips but he had like two or three tips that we got offensive rebounds for. I'm just really, really happy for him because, you know, his college career hasn't been easy with shoulder injury and red shirts and all those things.

But he's really, really shining, and I couldn't be more proud of him.

Q. Breaking the record, did you know you scored in the moment, or did you have no clue?

TYSON DEGENHART: I had a general idea. It's kind of, people will text me, "Oh, you're so far away." But you have a general idea of where you need be.

But I was more focused on just getting the win. I'm more excited to continue playing with these guys because this group is really, really special.

Q. It's rare a guy gets 19 points; what was the battle like --

EMMANUEL UGBO: He's a strong guy, a good friend of mine. There's trust going on.

That was also a five-man effort. Without my teammates, I would not be able to stop him. I think we did a good job just guarding him as a team. It's not just my effort.

Q. How much are you leaning into these moments? You've been a reserved guy on the court pretty much your whole career, and if there's a big moment, pumping up the fans or whatever, you seem to be embracing everything right now.

TYSON DEGENHART: It's the last go-around. You have to embrace every minute like it could be the last one. I just want to keep playing with this group. We've stuck together



through hard times this year, and to be in this spot is really, really special. So I'm just trying to cherish every moment.

Q. It's kind of campaign season. You control your fate with a win tomorrow. But does this team deserve to play in the NCAA Tournament?

TYSON DEGENHART: 100 percent. The difference between this team now and the team we had at the start of the year is completely different. We had some great wins, and we're hitting our stride at the right time. We had two great wins in this tournament but we're looking forward to getting one tomorrow, as well.

Q. Obviously Emm stepped up big time. What impressed you most tonight?

LEON RICE: He did it on both ends. He did it when we needed it most. He played himself through a couple mistakes because he was a little sped up in that first half, and he wanted to contribute so bad. He's just such a good, positive energy guy for us.

So you know, the whole team couldn't be happier for a guy like that because he's just always the guy that lifts up our locker room and every day, it's a lot of energy with Emms.

But he did some special things. 5-for-5 from the free throw line, 2-for-3 from three. 5-for-7. Some huge defensive plays, a couple blocks. Got some burns. He was battling a really, really good player.

But he's a reflection of the whole team, pretty much. They have all been stepping up when you need them most, and that's what we're going to need tomorrow. Because you know, it's a long three days, and you saw the two battles we've been in.

We need everybody that's with us to bring it.

Q. How big for you was that stretch from Andrew with that three and that dunk?

LEON RICE: It's huge. That's what we tell these guys: Every miss increases your odds on the next one when you're a great shooter. We want them shooting with confidence. You've got to make those timely ones, and you have to have some players that can step up and do it, and we've got some guys like that.

Q. Donovan had a couple big ones late but it seemed like mostly you frustrated him in the first half. What was the game plan for him?

LEON RICE: Yeah, I mean, he's just one of the best point

guards in the country. You can't guard him with one guy. You've got to guard him with a team, and sometimes that's not enough. I mean, he's a heck of a player and he's had a great career there. Certainly deserving of all the awards and accolades he gets.

You know, it's just you love competing against guys like that, and we love these kind of games. That's what you live for as players and coaches to be in these kind of games, and our guys are embracing that.

Q. If there's one thing that makes you think this team seems most prepared for these kind of moments, what would it be?

LEON RICE: It's the ability to respond to adversity, ability to get up off the floor, ability to kind of take some punches, get back up and go to your corner and then come out punching again. We've got a lot of that to us.

Q. When you speak about getting up again, is that the difference between this year and last year's --

LEON RICE: This team has nothing to do with last year. There's no comparison.

This team is its own team, and they are a pretty darned special group, and that's what I'm seeing.

Q. Foul trouble stayed with you guys the whole game. What do you guys have to do to work around that, and what does it say about this team that they were able to stay in there until the last five minutes?

LEON RICE: The last thing I wanted to do was take Tyson out with under four, but if he fouls out, I didn't see a way to win the game without him. And I had faith in Javan to come in, and he ended up with the rebound. Maybe he got fouled on in that melee but we had a time-out. So I was going to use it to get Tyson back in the game.

But we bought us enough -- because if they would have come down and pin one on Tyson there, that can be pretty rough.

Q. You've been to this tournament 14 times now. What does it mean to take it to the title game for the second time with a team that's been through so much?

LEON RICE: I mean, every team goes through a lot. I don't know if this team's been through more than any other team. Every team goes through a valley of death. Sometimes the valley can be longer. Sometimes you can't control it. Sometimes guys hit shots and things happen over a basketball season.



To be able to learn and develop that backbone and toughness, it's just how you respond. It's just how you respond. It's our culture.

When you get eight new guys that haven't been in our uniform, it sometimes takes a while to get everybody on the same page. That's the modern era, and we lost a lot of experience but I knew we had a lot of guys with great character. You don't know how fast everything is going to come together, and you learn a lot through the wars.

But when you have guys with high character, they show up, they have a great attitude, they have fun working, and we get after it.

Because of that, we're able to get better throughout the year. You know, like Tyson said, this team has just gotten better, better, better, every time out.

Q. Andrew was 1-of-8 to start the game from three and he hit one of the biggest shots in the game. What did you think of him in that moment?

LEON RICE: That's what we were talking about in the huddles. It didn't matter. It doesn't change who you are, Andrew. You're going to make the next one, and same with Peanut. And that's our mindset. Like I said, it increases your percentages when you miss some. Embrace the misses. You know you've got a lot of makes coming.

Q. In sports, you have to go out and earn it, but how deserving is Tyson of what's coming his way right now?

LEON RICE: Yeah, and that's why it's so cool because the whole team, there's no -- there's never any jealousy of Tyson because they know how much he cares about him, and they know how much work he does. And they know all the things he does for them and the sacrifice. He's a servant leader.

You know, this kind of goes along -- that's one of our maxims, and these guys all embrace that for each other. You saw how happy they are for Emms and Tyson.

Something that nobody has even talked about yet is Alvaro had 12 assists in 39 minutes in back-to-back games against teams that never gave him a possession, not one. I mean, that's some toughness, 12 assists. You know, that can cloud your decision-making. That can make -- and he threw a dime late in that game to the post and we scored. That was a huge bucket. But like that pass was like, wow.

The 12 assists, I mean, against that team, and when he had the ball for 39 minutes and then having to guard Dent at the other end, you know, that kid's as tough as they come. That's pretty special to have this year with him.

Q. The inbounds -- whose decision was it to run that play --

LEON RICE: Well, because they are extremely quick, and they can trap you. We didn't have any more time-outs. I always like to err on the side of aggressiveness. Let's go.

But then, you know, we followed it with a little bit of our mistake. Donovan is smart, though. He just went full speed and ran into us. That was a smart play. We should have jumped out of the way. Might have gone out-of-bounds.

We want to be aggressive all the time, and not be back on our heels. So that should have probably ended the game but we kept it a couple more possessions but we got it done. We managed it.

Q. Given the crowd tonight and the atmosphere and some of the calls in the first half, you were up against a lot, and even in the final minute when they had that dunk to take the lead and the roof is about to cave in. What can you say about the environment? One of the better wins in your career?

LEON RICE: I certainly can't remember many better than that. They all feel great but now because that happened tonight -- that was pretty special.

Like you said, you just felt like we were taking blows all night and getting knocked down, we get back up and we kept hanging in there, hanging in there, hanging in there, and made the crucial plays down the stretch. That's what winners do. I've got a lot of winners.

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