

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

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Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

UNLV Rebels

Joe Scott

Ethan Taylor

Jeremy Mills

Postgame Press Conference



UNLV 68, AIR FORCE 59

JOE SCOTT: I thought we played really hard. We played really well. We were ready to play. A lot of credit to these two guys. Ethan, over the last couple of days just doing a really good job making sure we're ready to play, having the energy required this time of year, having gone through what we've gone through, you know, I was impressed watching us play.

We picked up our game plan really quickly. When you have that kind of energy, that's what you find yourself being able to do, and we did it. And in the end, really what we didn't do is we didn't make shots. We had that stretch where we had eight straight wide open shots, eight straight wide open shots, and we didn't make one and it's been an Achilles heel for us all year.

But today we played in a manner taking care of the ball, playing the way you need to and executed the game plan about as well as we could, except for making those shots and Vegas and Bedford and Henley and Bear Cherry, at that juncture they came through and made those, and you gotta give them credit for that, and that was the difference in the game.

MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes. Ethan Taylor and Jeffrey Mills.

Q. Ethan, your previous scoring high in this tournament was 5 tonight you have 23 on 7 threes. Where did that come from? What was working for you?

ETHAN TAYLOR: All week, or the past two days when we were preparing for this game, a lot of coaches, they just

come in with confidence, talked to the team. We really wanted this one because we came into it with the mentality that everything was zero-zero.

So I just came on the court and gave it my all. We kind of went over the scouting report and knew what shots would be there, knew what actions would give me open shots.

So I just really honed in to that idea and the confidence they were imbuing into me and just shot the ball with confidence.

Q. What kind of went wrong in that second half when UNLV goes on that run?

JEFFREY MILLS: What Coach said. We weren't hitting the open shots. We were getting good looks. We were taking care of the ball, executing on offense. At the end of the day, we just had to put the ball in the basket.

ETHAN TAYLOR: Yeah. We just gotta get stops in that moment. We're not making shots and they were. The ball just doesn't go in sometimes. But on the flip side, we gotta get stops in those moments and we didn't.

Q. In the first half you did get some stops. You held them to 21 points, which I think is a tournament low for them historically. Just what was working on that end in the first half?

ETHAN TAYLOR: You know, we practiced a new defense and a new set that we wanted to run against them to kind of stop the norm they had against us this year. I think it was working. We did a really good job talking to each other and moving and playing with confidence, playing aggressive on defense.

And we were just able to get them out of their rhythm and force them to make shots that they don't normally get or force them to make looks that they don't normally make.

Q. You guys have a pretty young roster, a lot of underclassmen. Can you speak on your hopes for the future of the program and their roles in that?



JEFFREY MILLS: Yeah. Just hope they come in every day ready to give it their all, just grow up, mature and all that, and I think they can be a really good team if they just all come together, play together, and yeah.

ETHAN TAYLOR: When guys really buy in and you're able to get a group of guys who are all mature and play with the confidence that they belong, I think that's when the program will turn around, when you have guys who buy in 100 percent.

When you have younger guys and they're immature, it's tough to do everything you want to accomplish, but if all those younger guys really ban together and put their foot to it, it's a good group of guys and they can accomplish good things if they do what they need to do in the off season.

Q. Did you feel like you felt nerves from them or were they pretty confident today?

ETHAN TAYLOR: Oh, yeah. Everyone plays with confidence on our team and that's a good thing. The coaches and us seniors, we try to lead those guys in the right way so they can play with confidence and make less mistakes. I think they played with confidence and played well. At the end of the day, you just gotta put the ball in the basket.

Q. When you left the court for the last time, can you talk about what was going through your mind, and were you reflecting on your career or any of that?

JEFFREY MILLS: Kind of, yeah. Kind of felt surreal for me. Just wanted to make sure that if it was my last game, I gave it all I had, and I feel like I did that and my teammates did that. And so I'm just thankful to be able to play basketball, yeah.

ETHAN TAYLOR: Yeah. I was just thankful. Walking off the court, it's never what you expect it to be in that moment when it's your last time on the court with some of your closest friends, but I just wanted to take it all in and really just like appreciate all the hard work and everything I've done over the past year to put me in this position.

MODERATOR: Anything else for the student-athletes? Okay. We'll dismiss them at this time. Thank you, men.

Questions for Coach?

Q. Coach, you touched on it a little bit already, but just how impressed were you with the energy from the group from the tip and just the belief it seemed that they had that they can go get this one?

JOE SCOTT: Yeah. I mean, I think, like I said, when you've gone through what we've gone through over the last, you know, three years since the rules, all these rules changed, you know, it's been hard, and those two guys right there and the other seniors, never once have they not given what they have.

And they've been real good leaders that way, and I think that showed today when you get to this time and it's March and things aren't great, you know, because of those guys. We came in Monday, and I was a little concerned watching our energy, and it's March and things haven't been great.

But I talked to them and we practiced, and we had a way better practice on Tuesday, and really, it's all because of those two guys, the way they came in and they listened, and they really did a really good job with that. And it showed today.

It showed, and they picked up the game plan really quickly. They executed it really well. Like I said, we just came short like we have a lot. That ball didn't go in the basket. Will Cooper is 0 for 5 from three. The kid's been shooting 45 percent from three.

You want to win this game, like we all know, you gotta make some of those shots. Not all of them, but in that stretch, I think 0 for 8, that really hurt us, and we gotta just learn.

To what your question is, is the energy that we had, it was obvious, you gotta play that way all the time. You gotta be that way every day because this level is extremely hard. And we're playing against teams that have all these older guys that, you know, they're good teams.

So you gotta have that kind of energy, and we did today and you can see when we have that, okay, there's something there.

Q. How proud are you of a guy like Ethan who's struggled historically, I guess, in this tournament and for him to come out and do what he did today?

JOE SCOTT: I mean, I was really happy for him that people in the league rewarded him and recognized his play throughout the year by making him third team. That's a pretty good honor, and when you look at our team, the lack of success, I think that says -- that meant a lot to me that other people in this league looked at Ethan and saw, wow, the kid gives everything he's got all the time.

There's a lot on his shoulders. There's a lot on his plate. And he showed today that, you know what, he's a good



player. And we obviously needed more guys to step up that way. But I couldn't ask anything more from Ethan throughout the whole season.

Q. Besides Ethan, did any other player stand out to you today?

KEVIN KRUGER: I thought, overall, everybody in terms of their, like I said, energy level, effort level, every guy. We played well. We took care of the basketball really well. We got really good shots. So I thought everybody sort of raised their level in what you have to do.

We have to learn to develop a consistency in that regard. And that might be the reason why the ball didn't go in the basket, because when you're not consistent with that game after game, you never really teach yourself how to put those things in the basket in games like today.

Because, like I said, it's not just Will. Beau. We had open shots and they didn't go in at key times in the game. But overall, just watching us play with the mental and physical, sort of, toughness that you need to have, we definitely had it today.

Q. I believe you guys are 0 and 7 against UNLV in tournament play. What do you hope to see from next year's squad to potentially get over that hump?

JOE SCOTT: Well, I don't really know if I'm thinking about next year's squad yet. But the time will come.

Really, all it really is is I've talked to our strength coach already about what our postseason plan is going to be. We gotta get to work on it on, say, April 1st, and like I've said to our players, it's not really what you think.

It's what it is with 18 and 19 year-old kids. Ethan said the word immature, mature. It's not what you think. It's what you see, and maturity means I see what the level of competition is. I see what my challenge is. I don't think anything. I see that. I listen to my coaches, and I go do something about it by having that kind of energy and the right approach every day.

And that's really what we have to get better at, and we need every guy in that locker room to get better at that and get everything out of your head, any thoughts that you have about this. None of that matters, and if you watch these games and you see these games, you know that, and that requires something from each guy to sort of raise their level that way. And that's what we're going to focus on.

Q. I think you may have just answered this, but what

does the aftermath of this game look like? You guys going to rest for a little bit before getting back out there?

JOE SCOTT: We'll take off probably until the week before the Final Four. They'll get started with our strength program. Basketball will start the week after that. And we don't have a lot of time at the academy. That's another thing here that's completely different than any other school that we compete against.

So we gotta try to figure out in that five, six-week period before finals how we can maximize that time, and that's what we're going to focus on.

Q. Did they play the way you expected? Are they that much different without Thomas in terms of watching them?

JOE SCOTT: You know, I think they've played multiple games now. This could be game six without him. So you gotta give a lot of credit, I think, to Kevin, for adjusting. Just, sort of, Henley has really stepped up. They've had guys step up. Bedford and Henley are good players. They can score.

Bear, you know, he kills us. I think he was 100 percent coming into the game. In fact, he missed four shots and we were like, oh, man. But I think they've just done a good job of making the adjustments of not playing without him.

Obviously, playing with him makes them a completely different type of team because he has the ball in his hands so much.

I think the fact that they've played six games without him has helped those other guys, obviously if Rishwain hadn't gotten hurt. I think that really hurts them because in some ways, they have some good pieces there even down a couple guys.

Those guys seem like they know how to play together and play off each other pretty well. And being down a guy that he's done a good job of saying, okay, let's slow it down, we gotta play this way. And those guys can put the ball in the basket, you know.

I think give them credit, and because of that and the experiences they've had playing without him, I think they're going to be fine. It'll just be a matter of whether or not they run out of gas of playing more games, not having enough guys. But competitive wise, I think they're going to be more than fine competitive wise.

MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you for your time, Coach.



