

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Boise State Broncos

Leon Rice

Tyson Degenhart

Alvaro Cardenas

Postgame Press Conference



Boise State 62, San Diego State 52

LEON RICE: You know, we've had a great history of battles with San Diego State, so we knew today would be no different. Tip of the hat to them. That was a competitive basketball game.

We knew they got a little distance there, and then we closed the gap right before half to be down five. And the thing that we talked about in the locker room is a game like this is not going to be won in the first half. They beat us to some balls that ended up being really costly. When O'Mar got his third foul, they were quicker to the ball than us and got the loose one. O'Mar gets a foul. I think it was an and-1, and that summed up a little bit of the first half for them.

In the second half I think the play that summed up maybe our effort and intensity was, I think, 26 guys dove on the floor for both teams, and somehow our guys came up with it, and then it ended up being an and-1 on the other end for Andrew.

That's how these games are with these two teams. They're great competitors on both teams, and our guys just kept scrapping and were tough enough to persist. Made some timely threes, especially about the last six minutes. Really, really proud of our effort. That was an intense basketball game, and got to hand it to all these guys.

Q. Guys, your defense, you held them to five points in the final nine minutes, no field goals in the last five minutes of the game. Your defense this year was not where it needed to be. To win your game with some big steps down the stretch, what can you say about that?

TYSON DEGENHART: It was a heck of an effort by our team. It was a great game plan by our coaches. I think all of us felt very, very prepared with what they were going to run, and whenever something was called, we had an idea of what it was going to be, and we just did a great job of just flying around, especially in the late second half, just flying around to loose balls and just getting our hands on a lot of them. Very, very proud of this group and our effort?

Q. Tyson, a bit of a game of runs to start the second half, then it halted in the middle. What were you focusing on in those moments?

TYSON DEGENHART: Just playing really, really hard. We knew our backs were against the wall, halftime being down five. It could have been our last game together, and we did not want to make that happen. We left it all out there, and it ended in a great result?

Q. Alvaro, five minutes left to go, I thought the turning point was when you and Tyson hit those threes back to back. What went into that? What does that do for confidence the rest of the way?

ALVARO CARDENAS: Yeah, we had discussed in our meetings and stuff that if you get an open shot, you've got to shoot it every time because their defense is so good and they swarm to the ball. A lot of times you get an open shot in the first 10 seconds of the possession, and then you turn it down and decide to drive it, and it ends up being a turnover.

So our mindset was really when we have an open shot, we're going to take it every time.

Tyson, we believe in him to keep shooting the ball, and it shows his character because he airballed the one before, and the play after, he hits a three.

I'm not even trying to be funny, but that shows who he is. We talk about response all the time. It doesn't matter that he airballed the one before. We trust him to take another shot.



Q. Tyson, now your situation with the team, advancing on to the rest of the tournament. How does this make you feel in terms of your career at Boise State and where you're at?

TYSON DEGENHART: We're not done yet. I can promise you that. We didn't come here to win one game, we came here to win the whole thing, and ultimately, that starts the rest of the night with us getting prepared for New Mexico, getting rest and recovery, and we'll have great prep and be ready to go for tomorrow?

Q. When you're shooting from three for 11 for 40, is that something you guys feel comfortable about, like you know that maybe when that goes off the board, you're able to have those threes come in for you guys and just feel comfortable in that situation?

TYSON DEGENHART: Yeah, what I was saying about getting an open look and we were taking it, there's sometimes where you don't shoot it and it ends up being a bad possession. We had 13 offensive rebounds tonight. So when we missed it, we went and got our own misses. I think that was a big part of our game, as well.

Q. Tyson, building off that, 13 offensive rebounds for you guys tonight. San Diego State only had four. That's a massive recipe for success, obviously, against the Aztecs. What did you think of your efforts on the board tonight that led to, I believe, an 18-3 advantage in second-chance points at least?

TYSON DEGENHART: It was just one of our things that with these battles against San Diego State, if you're able to win the rebounding margin by that much, you're normally going to put yourself in a great spot to win. Our effort was tremendous on the glass, especially down in the second half. Only allowing that team to have four offensive rebounds is pretty remarkable.

Q. Al, for you, you didn't attempt a two-point field goal for like the first 6-plus minutes of the game. You didn't make one for over 10 minutes. What was the curve ball or whatever it was that you guys dialed up to try to throw at San Diego State today?

ALVARO CARDENAS: Credit to them. They're the No. 1 team in the country in blocked shots. So it is really hard to score two-point field goals against them. Like I said, our game plan was to not pass up shots, and whenever we had an open three, we were going to shoot them and try to spread them out a little bit.

So I mean, that was kind of the mindset, and that's why

that happened.

Q. Just the emotional swings there and down the stretch, whether it's the big block from O'Mar and Keen diving into their bench to save the ball, and you mentioned the big threes, and Tyson got the big put-back, Keen had the put-back, winning plays down the stretch. What can you say about the back and forth there and you guys stepping up and making those key plays when you needed?

TYSON DEGENHART: It was just a tremendous team effort. Guys took shots that we were comfortable with, and even though we missed them, we had guys go get them, and we had a lot of great second-chance points. It was 18-3 on second-chance points, so that's a huge swing in this game. I'm just really proud of our effort.

ALVARO CARDENAS: Added to that, shout out to O'Mar Stanley and RJ Keene. They both played 22 and 18 minutes, only took two shots combined. O'Mar didn't shoot a single time the whole game, and his energy didn't change throughout the whole game, and it really helped us.

That kind of just shows the type of guy he is, him and Keene, and basically everyone on this team. They're willing to do their role at the highest level and be so unselfish.

Q. Three-point attempts ties a school record ^ check . How much of that was game planning and how much of that was what San Diego State was doing to stop you guys?

TYSON DEGENHART: It was a little bit of both. We weren't sure if Gwath was going to play or not and we expected him to play. But even with him out of the lineup, they're still No. 1 in the country in blocked shot percentage. If we had an open look, we were going to shoot it, and we have a lot of faith in our guys in rebounding the ball, and we just went and got the O-boards, and able to play that off.

Q. Al, you mentioned RJ, as well. He's diving into their bench, he's all over the place as usual. We talk about him being a glue guy, but just how big was he tonight for what you guys did?

ALVARO CARDENAS: Yeah, he's been like that the whole season. I've read some people just saying certain things about him, how he can't score and stuff like that. But the value that he adds to this team is really tremendous, and he's one of the -- nine rebounds, 18 minutes. He's one of the most unselfish guys I've ever been around. He truly doesn't care about anything but winning, and that's why we love him.

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

Q. What's your take on Las Vegas being the host city for this event, and do you think it's a good neutral site for the tournament?

LEON RICE: Great. I mean, it is a good neutral site. There's a lot going on here and people like to come here, and they show up for this spot. Yeah, it's not ideal that one of our teams, this is their home court. But it is what it is. No, we love -- after a win, we love being here, no doubt (laughing).

Q. Al, what's it mean to get one more chance to fight with this team for an NCAA Tournament bid?

ALVARO CARDENAS: Yeah, I mean, that was All-Star whole mindset tonight. We didn't want this to be our last game. We're just taking it one game at a time. We've got New Mexico now, so that's what we're focused on right now.

Q. Tyson, we saw your teammates mob you during that interview after the game. How fun is this team to be around?

TYSON DEGENHART: This is one of the funnest teams I've ever been around, just our camaraderie starting in the summer and just progressing throughout the year. Our togetherness never wavered throughout all the ups and downs of the season. We're as connected of a group as I've ever been a part of, and it's going to take us a long way.

Q. Al, I believe you were 0 and 8 against San Diego State going into this game. How badly did you want to beat them, and what changed for you?

ALVARO CARDENAS: Very badly. I hadn't won in four years. I thought it was just a perfect storm. I had full belief that we were going to beat them today. It was really, really hard to beat a team three times in a row, and I think the whole team believed that we could do it. But once it's done, we were just focused on the next one now.

Q. What is the one word for each of the guys, and even you too, Coach Rice, that pops out when you say -- what is one word that describes Boise State men's basketball team?

LEON RICE: Toughness. The toughness that -- like he talked about, where he missed a three and he's got the toughness to shoot the next one and make it. It's the mental and the physical, and we've got both. We've got a lot of it in that room.

It's a long season. It's a grind. You guys pour everything into it. When you lose, you're just devastated. They have the toughness to get themselves up, dust themselves off and get back in the fight.

We're never out of the fight with these guys.

Q. What is the one song that best describes Coach Rice?

TYSON DEGENHART: "Don't Stop Believing" by Journey. Throughout this whole year, he's always believed in us. He's always had the faith that we're going to turn this thing around, and he did a great job of that this year. We're going to keep it going.

LEON RICE: I thought you would say "Roll Me Up and Smoke Me When I Die." (Laughter).

Q. Coach, the defensive effort, especially there in the final 10 minutes, to limit a team like that to no field goals, five points over the last nine minutes, what can you say?

LEON RICE: Yeah, just, first of all, the staff did an amazing job prepping. I think it was a blessing -- it sounds crazy, but to be in that game first because we needed some time to adjust some things. We did not -- the blocked shots were about even tonight. That was something we had to adjust. We had to guard them a little bit better, and Coach Burns and the staff made amazing adjustments both ways.

Kudos to those guys and the players for buying in. They knew what we were doing. They knew what we wanted to do. We did some things differently at the end, that we were waiting on.

But it was those guys that made it work. We can scheme all we want; those guys made it work.

Q. Leon, you know how hard it is to win games here. You have to play really good basketball. What does it do for your program to come down here and beat a really good San Diego State team on a big stage?

LEON RICE: Yeah, it was huge because the staff felt the same way the players do. The players -- the biggest thing since we've known we were playing San Diego State is, I don't want to be done with these guys. That's how they feel about each other, and we'll walk across broken glass to keep playing, and that's what it took tonight.

Q. BJ asked you the other day, it's not like you can shoot threes every possession, but you certainly tried



there for the first part of that game --

LEON RICE: Yeah, BJ was on to me, I think, and I've never, ever, I don't think in my coaching career basically said "no comment," and that was a no comment. But it would have been the definition of insanity to -- and that was an adjustment for us. We're one of the best two-point field goal teams. So our style did not match up with their style defensively, so we had to adjust, and we had to make that work.

I think our target was between 36 and 50 threes, is what we said, because that's what we were going to make happen.

But part of that was the offensive boards. So you can't shoot those if you're going to stand around and watch them rebound it. We didn't. That's the way we had to beat them, and we knew it. We were not going to beat them going in there at the rim. They're No. 1 in the nation. No square peg, round hole, and you saw a couple times when we didn't do the way we wanted to do it, they blocked shots.

But a credit to our guys. Plus it gives them the mindset of confidence. You can't be a good shooter if you're not going to shoot it with confidence, and I think you saw that in our guys.

For the first time in my career, I got mad at Tyson at practice, and I pulled him out of practice partly because I didn't want him to get hurt, but he turned down a three, and I said, no, that's bull; might as well just say that it's selfish if you're not going to shoot those. I have confidence in you. Every one of these players has confidence in you. If you're not going to shoot them, come stand next to me. That way he couldn't get hurt.

But I wanted him to understand that, like, that kid is an elite shooter. Let it rip. Sometimes he's too unselfish with that. So I wanted him to -- the one he made was -- that was a big one.

Q. What is one word to describe the Mountain West conference basketball?

LEON RICE: Underrated. I think underrated because that team we just played is -- when you say -- sometimes you can throw that up and say, they can beat anybody. Well, they beat a No. 1 seed already in Houston. They beat Creighton. They've got a resume that's terrific. The only reason maybe our -- we're not getting the national respect that we've gotten recently is because our numbers aren't as high just because of the way the numbers are with some of the bottom numbers that we played this year.

Those numbers, there's lies, there's damn lies and there's the NET. You get rewarded for winning by 50-some, all those kind of things factor into the numbers.

I know what the eye test tells me about them and about us and about Colorado State and Utah State and New Mexico. These teams are as good as any that have been in this league, and these players and these coaches -- you take these top -- and don't forget Nevada. It goes on and on. These are good teams that maybe are not getting the -- like I said earlier, when we played New Mexico, it was a joke that they weren't ranked. I mean, it was crazy. They had like three or four losses, and they were leading this league.

And so it wasn't getting the respect that it usually gets. Part of that's, we're on the west coast. Part of that is a lot of people don't see our late games. All those kind of things matter. But I'll stack these teams up against any in the country, and like us, we've beaten Clemson, we've beaten St. Mary's, some great teams, on and on, New Mexico, beat UCLA, VCU, USC, on and on. I'm forgetting some good ones they have.

But this is a heck of a basketball league, and you saw two really good teams tonight.

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