

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Wyoming Cowboys

Coach Sundance Wicks

Naz Meyer

Leland Walker

Gavin Gores

Postgame Press Conference

UNLV 73, Wyoming 70

THE MODERATOR: For Wyoming, we have student-athletes Naz Meyer, Leland Walker, Gavin Gores, Coach Sundance Wicks.

Coach, if we can start with you and get some thoughts on today's game.

SUNDANCE WICKS: Yeah, first thing, we're not going to shed any tears up here right now, because we're going to try to keep playing postseason basketball. So that's our number one goal is to try to play with this team as long as we can whether it's NIT, CBI. We're going to try to play more basketball. We have a young team that wants to continue play.

We have a great senior leader in Leland Walker, who deserves to play as long as he possibly can. I just want this experience to go on.

There are some teams where you just know that they love playing. These guys love to play the game of basketball. I'm disappointed in the fact that -- you know, I think we deserved a chance to go win the game because I thought UNLV did a great job of hunting a match-up and getting to play late in the game. The ball went in.

That ball goes in, I think that game should be a tie ball game, and I think we should have a chance to go win the game. That's what I think should happen.

Now, doesn't always work like that, so we got two shots at the end of the game that were both good looks to go win it



as well right there, but I'm not going to sit up here and talk about would have, should have, could have and what these guys mean to me right now, because our season is not over yet. We're going to continue to play.

I'm going to tip my cap to UNLV. They came out hair on fire in the first half. I think that really kind of put us on our heels, and we had a big hole to dig out of, which a testament to our guys who have been resilient all year long and played an unbelievable second half to put us in position to be able to go make the plays.

We did that with a sophomore in could Marion Dennis, two freshmen in Gavin and Naz and a heck of a senior leader here in Leland Walker. I can't speak enough on how proud I am of Leland, what he's done the last four games. One turnover in the last four games. He's led our team. He's the single reason our guys show up with great energy, effort, enthusiasm every day because he's an every day dude as a leader. Those guys are hard to find. He's an unbelievable human being. You'll never find anybody to say a bad word about Leland Walker. I'm excited to continue to coach this guy, and I wish I could have coached him for four years. If I coached him for four years we would be sitting up here talking about championships for a long time.

What these freshmen have to learn, they have to learn what it's like to lead every day like Leland does so he can pass the torch down to these guys, because these guys are going to carry the flag for Wyoming here for the next couple of years. That's an important thing for these guys to understand what it means to be that guy in his shoes every single day.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. You had a fantastic season leading this season. What's it feel like to have Gavin Gores off the bench coming out for the Cowboys?

LELAND WALKER: Gavin Gores is a freshman, and he's playing like he's been in college for a long time, just like Naz Meyer. They're great guys. They show up every day



and watch film. I love these guys.

Q. Gavin Gores, momentum followed you told, sir. How did that feel for you as a cowboy?

GAVIN GORES: Felt great to help my team and keep making plays and going to try and win.

Q. Leland, what do you think happened in the first half? It looked like you had a good warmup, and then for your first 14 from three, how do you feel like the team came out with any momentum?

LELAND WALKER: We didn't come out with the energy we needed to, but in the second half, I felt like we picked it up really well. We can't rely on making shots in the first half. I feel like we relied on trying to make shots and then not playing defense. Second half, we had a talk and came out and did what we had to do.

Q. Leland, it seemed like, obviously, the second half strategy was to get to the basket. I guess what was the shift in energy? It feels like it came out with a lot of energy in the second half, and what was kind of the conversation in the locker room at halftime?

LELAND WALKER: Basically we got to nut up. We got to come out, play hard. You know, we're not trying to go home, stuff like that. It's my last year, so I'm trying to give it my all.

Q. Leland, just to follow up on that, what's been your experience in this short time at Wyoming and playing for a guy like Sundance Wicks?

LELAND WALKER: Honestly, I love Wicks. I just love Wicks, man. He's been on me from the day I got recruited, the day I got recruited. I wish I could have played for him four more years. He's been a great coach to me and my teammates, and he's one of the coaches that's going to let you know about yourself if you're not doing right.

I feel that's something I needed in my college experience, and I'm going to take that with me as I go as I go play professional.

Q. Naz, that three-pointer at the buzzer at halftime, how much did that kind of lift this team going into the halftime? If all three of you could answer that question, too?

NAZ MEYER: I would say it was a good momentum changer for sure, but at the end of the day, I don't think it sparked any more energy than it needed to for us to come out in the second half ready to go. I think it was just

everybody trying to play for each other and not let this be the last game, that type of thing. Yeah, that's what I got to say about that.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss our student-athletes.

Questions for Coach.

Q. First of all, looking at the last few minutes there, you got two freshmen a sophomore. How do you build off of that year?

SUNDANCE WICKS: They grew up a lot this year. They got a lot of young guys that got minutes. We wanted them to be in this environment. We didn't get to play at UNLV this year. I think the unfamiliarity of being in the gym for the first time, I think it helps when you come down here and you play, and you actually come back to it. We've always been better when we've seen a team first and then played them second, or we've been to a place and we had that familiarity with it. That's part of growing up in the process here.

But our future is so bright with these young guys, and that's our biggest plight right now at Wyoming, is retention so we can have the consistency to compete for championships. I think that's the biggest thing going nowadays in college basketball is, can you retain? Because you can be consistent with your culture, and then you can compete for championships. That's going to be a massive emphasis here in this offseason and whatever this offseason is.

Look, I got guys like Leland Walker who can make plays, calling plays for Gavin Gores and calling plays for Naz Meyer because they're equipped, and they need to learn how to handle those moments. Damarion Dennis can play with and flow with anybody as much as I've been around. You don't have to call for him. He can just go play. He's a double-double as a 6'1" guard and didn't let DGA get a point in the second half. He didn't let them get a point in the second half. I mean, that's how good Damarion was on DGA. The first half, we were all over the place.

We went in the locker room. We talked about getting stops. The only thing that matters in March, can you defend, rebound, take care of the basketball? We won in every statistical category except making shots.

The outlier here is you can never put value on can you make shots, but you are going to have to make them in March if you want to continue to play. So as good as you defended, as good as you rebounded, as good as you took care of the basketball, have you to make some shots.

That's one thing we'll have to address in the offseason is

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

can we go get a guy that can be a consistent shot-maker? I wish Khaden Bennett could have been in the game more without foul trouble. I wish, because he's a huge, integral piece for us.

Q. You always talk about wanting to have the last possession, having a chance to win or tie. Was that kind of similar? It seemed like a very similar play to the Fresno game where you get to the last-second shot. I think Naz took the last-second shot. Did you like the look?

SUNDANCE WICKS: It was clean. It was wide open. I mean, it was wide open. 14 feet, Naz Meyer is one of our toughest shot-makers, right? He's got size to shoot over guys. He was wide open, and until you're in that moment, you know, and he's been in a couple of those, but I always go back to former players I've had. Noah Reynolds missed six game-winning shots before he started making his.

That's the hard part. Everybody remembers the game winners, but the players remember the ones where they don't go in. Everybody remembers the one where you are sitting there saying, I had the chance, and it didn't go in. As a coach it's our job to sit there and protect them from their own conscience where they sit there and they go, Man, am I built for this? Can I go be a winner? Can I go make the winning plays?

It's like, Look, man, we're going to put you in so many situations, every year you're going to have those opportunities. You got to be like a goldfish. You got to have a short-term memory, and you got to be able to go out there and make the next play.

You draw back on those experiences, but you can't sit there and live in the past. So as we continue to play guys like Naz, Gavin, Damarion, KB, I want those guys in situations where they challenge themselves to remember those just like we used to do when we were kids. Go play on the playground, three, two, one, go make the shot. You had that blazed in your mind.

I thought it was a great look, and Damarion got the ball, got the rebound, shot it. I think in those moments, if I'm just being honest, you call goaltending. You know why? Because you can review it. That's what I think.

No matter what happens, you call the goaltend, because at least then you can go and be, like, Hey, it wasn't a goaltend. Then we know.

Rather than sit there and say, Well, was it, wasn't it, just make the call. You get a free pass as an official to make that call. That's the thing that drives me nuts on that play.

Just make the call and see what happens. Then you can go back and review it.

You got every angle in the Mountain West. I know Dennis and those guys do a phenomenal job back there. They have the cameras locked and loaded. Make the call. Go review it and see where it's at. I can live with that. I can live with that.

Q. You talked in the season about the Midi-chlorian count. Talk about the Midi-chlorian count of of Gavin, Leland, and Naz.

SUNDANCE WICKS: I love that you love "Star Wars." Nobody in here knows what Midi-chlorian count is except me and you.

We are very fortunate. We're going to be a program that always recruits youth. We're still going to recruit high school kids. We don't have an exorbitant amount of money to go buy a high-level transfer portal kid. We can't do that, so we're going to have to develop.

We're going to have to develop not only players skill-wise, but we're going to have to develop our relationships so that we can win out in the long run. We still have to play a long game here. There is no short-term play at Wyoming. There's no short-term fix at Wyoming. We're going to have to find people who believe in the mission and the vision and ride for the brand as hard as I do up here and that want to say, you know what, we're going to run this back, and everybody needs to be a Cowboy again.

I think when that happens, we'll be sitting in here talking about different things. We'll be talking about, Man, are you guys ready for a championship; you guys are competing for a championship?

Guys like Naz and Gavin, we got them because they had an opportunity to come play as freshmen, and they had the opportunity to come develop and fail and grow and learn and succeed and repeat over and over and over again. I think I missed that part of coaching. I think a lot of coaches miss that part of coaching, the idea that you can go actually watch a young man come in here in the middle of the summer like Gavin and have a breakdown four weeks into the summer because he's such a high achiever, such a high achiever, that he's, like, This is hard.

As a coach, you get to watch him go through that moment, and then you get to see him go out there with 1:45 and I get to call a play for Gavin to go score and put us up two. I got to watch that in the summer. I got to see that. I got a front seat to that entire process.

I get a front seat to Naz Meyer coming in every day, win or lose, every practice, whether it was good or bad, watching film for an hour and kicking him out of my office because he cares so much about his development and the growth and learning and then watching his other teammates on film and watching how he can make us better, which in turn, makes him better. I got a front seat to that development.

I'm going to be pissed off if coaches come in here and take these guys that we spent a lot of time on. I'm never going to be able to sit there and say we didn't give everything we possibly could to these guys to become the best version of themselves.

When they go have success, whether it's at Wyoming or somewhere else or professionally, we know that we invested the right amount of time and the quality of care in these guys, and we'll always hang our hat on that at Wyoming. That's just the way we do it.

So from a midi-chlorian count, we're just lucky that we get to go find guys that are stuck on Tatooine and want an opportunity to go race. You know what I'm talking about. "The Clone Wars" here. They get an opportunity to come out and develop themselves and find out who they really are. So many times these programs just want a ready-made dude, a quick fix.

I mean, I'm watching Tyrin Jones out there have six blocks. How lucky is UNLV to have a freshman like Tyrin Jones right now? If Tyrin just sticks to the process and stays at UNLV and has a coach that believes in him and lets him play as a freshman, that's one of the most impactful things you can have in a program is a coach who believes in you and allows you to fail and doesn't sit there and say, Well, you're not good enough. Let me go pay that guy to replace you. No.

For us, let's go pay those guys that we developed to stay here and continue to make them, not only Padawans, but Jedi Masters.

Q. After the first half struggles, what did you really love about the resiliency and the fight in the second half?

SUNDANCE WICKS: Yeah, just locker room. What are we afraid of? You know, what are we afraid of right now? Guys were out there playing tight and shooting shots, they're pulling it back like it's real quick. It's being in that moment.

I told them, these things come quick. You get a chance to decompress and breathe and kind of reset yourself, settle

in. I told our guys, man, just focus on winning medias and getting stops. We talked turkeys. Get three stops in a row. We got four turkeys in the second half. We had zero in the first half, four or five turkeys in the second half. And that's what helps you go on run. You get three stops in a row. That helps you go on a run.

That's the resiliency of these guys. Uriyah Rojas stepped up when Khaden Bennett went out, and I thought Uriyah played great today. I thought he played within himself again.

But once again, all these things are learning processes for these guys. I think we're speaking objectively on this, where young men fail now in this process, and the people that advise them is they think just because they had a little bit of success at a place early, that they're ready to jump up a level, and they're going to have the same success up at the next level, which, it doesn't work like that.

I think if you are having success at a place -- it's like a coach. All these coaches in the search season now -- it's called search season. All these coaches, they leave these levels and keep going up and up and up, and sometimes you are just at the right spot. You know, you're at the right spot to go have success for a long period of time, and I think as players, wouldn't you rather be at a spot where -- think about freshmen, Gavin, Naz, let's talk about the freshmen.

If they just had continued -- just a little bit of incremental success at Wyoming from 18 wins to maybe 20 wins to 24 wins, and then all of a sudden they're seniors, and they have a magical season or juniors or senior and have a magical season, 25 to 28 wins and playing in the NCAA Tournament. They stayed at a level where they could have continued success and development in the process.

They're not going to get worse if they stay here. We saw the bar right now. They're not going to get worse. They're only going to get better within our program and within our system. And then all of a sudden someone says, Well, just go make the jump. Then they go progression, regression.

Now everybody is wondering, Well, why wasn't he as good? He was so good at Wyoming. Why isn't he good there? He went up another level with a brand new coach and brand new system, with a brand new culture, and a brand new scheme and a brand new way of defending the basketball and a brand new way of guarding and a brand new way of running stuff.

If I have to relearn that crap every year, I'm going to be a bad coach, and players are going to have a natural regression. So sometimes just be where your feet are,

don't mess with happy, and then find a way to double down on how you have continued success.

Q. Coach, you've talked all year about this year being about improvement, next year being about championships. Won five of the last six in the conference. Came real close in this game. How do you carry that momentum over into the next season regardless of who is on the roster?

SUNDANCE WICKS: We'll continue to play postseason, so telling the NIT to let us in. Our numbers will be good enough, right? We'll be under the 125 marker.

CBI is down in Daytona as well with the Gazelle Group, and we're playing in the NTE down in Daytona as well.

So the first part is, we got to go get a postseason win in one of these tournaments. We have to play postseason again. I want them to keep feeling these moments and keep having these moments. To fight for championships, you have to put yourself in championship environments and go play for a tournament, go play another tournament and reset and chart all over again.

Then the next big thing is just roster retention. So we survive year one, progress year two, championship advancement in year three. That's just our mindset. We're going to keep speaking that and speaking that and speaking that into existence.

Then we got to have a locker room full of guys, not only coaches, that believe in that vision and that mission and want to run it back. In the next couple of weeks here, we'll be in the fight of our lives to keep the guys that want to be Cowboys and retain the majority of this roster to be able to have that opportunity.

It's not guaranteed now. It's not guaranteed just because we keep the roster, we're going to come back and have success. We all know there's a lot of good teams that lost in the first round of March Madness, and that sucks. I feel bad for them. That's the world we live in right now.

So although it's not guaranteed, it does give us a higher chance of winning later in March. It gives us better Vegas odds if we keep this roster intact.

To that matter, I think that those are the next viable steps for us.

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