

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 11, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

UNLV Rebels

Coach Josh Pastner

Dra Gibbs-Lawhorn

Kimani Hamilton

Postgame Press Conference

UNLV 73, Wyoming 70

THE MODERATOR: We'll begin with UNLV. Coach, your thoughts on today's game?

JOSH PASTNER: I want to say this about Wyoming. Sundance Wicks is an outstanding coach. They're very well-coached. They have really good players. They play as anyone else in this league. Over the last month of the season, they've won 5 of 6, so I knew that was going to be a tough game, because they're really good, really good.

I want to give a lot of credit to Coach Wicks and their team, their program, their staff, because like I said, they've got really good players, and they're a really good basketball team, very well-coached.

Secondly, I really believe this in life, life, everything is deeper than it looks on the surface, because -- you know, look, I wanted to beat San Diego State so darn bad, like you wouldn't believe it, but you lose a game, and this has been -- I got so many text messages after that game on, like, Saturday and Sunday just saying that, you know, you know the Mountain West Conference Tournament has just been really hard for UNLV, that they've been 0 for 10 in the last decade, beating a team that's not named Air Force in the last decade.

So when we lost to San Diego State, if we had beaten San Diego State, our first game would have been against Air Force, and we would have been the fifth seed. By the loss, which I would have rather have won, obviously, but things are deeper than they look on the surface, gives you the opportunity in the first game to play Wyoming, that if you are fortunate enough to win the game, you've broke the streak, for crying out loud, of the last decade of not beating



anyone in this tournament other than Air Force.

That was really great to be able to do that, and proud of our guys to do that. Really proud of our guys on that.

Thirdly, I thought our late-game execution, which has been pretty good for the most part for a lot of this year. We've won a lot of close games. We're 3-0 in overtime. We've won a lot of close games. So our late-game execution really was at a high level.

Obviously, this isn't a plays game. It's a players' game. The guys next to me got the job done, made big shots, and that's just the bottom line.

Last couple of stats, I thought really great for us. Because I got everybody here, you know, we've averaged -- in the regular season -- so Tyler, you can put this in your notes in making sure -- just so you have it. I told Cali this as well, too, Madison for you, and anybody else in the local media, we averaged 82.2 points per game this year, which is the best since the '17-'18 season and second highest since -- I didn't mean you. Sorry.

I was with Madison yesterday on the thing. I got too many things going on. You know what I meant. Yeah, you work for the same station, bottom line. I saw Chris earlier, too.

Anyway, 80.2 points per game. Best since '17-'18. Second highest since '99 perform-2000. The way we've scored the ball has been at a high level.

Tyrin Jones led the conference at shot-blocking. He had six this afternoon. It's the first time a guy at UNLV has led the league in Mountain West conference in shot-blocking since the '14-'15 season. Our tempo was 48th in the country. These are regular season stats, and -- which was the best since the best since the '17-'18 season.

Tyrin Jones led the conference in Mountain West play in field goal percentage, offense, which was the best since -- first time to happen since '17-'18. We finished top 75 nationally in field goal percentage, best in '17-'18.



Now, I don't have a lot of defensive stats in there, and that's been an issue of ours. That's something we've got to be to be better at defensively to match up with our offense.

If we can get both together, we could be a great team, and that's just even not only for this year, but moving for the future. Those are things we'll look at.

Just want to throw those stats out. I'll be quiet. These two guys are awesome with a capital A. Big-time shot there. He's been unbelievable, and just so proud of these young men. They're great guys. Really fine young men.

Go Rebels.

THE MODERATOR: We'll take questions for the student athletes first, and then we'll come back to Coach.

Q. Dra, you go for 15 in the first half, scoreless in the second half. How do you keep yourself in it as they're making their run and make plays elsewhere? How big was it that your teammates, Kimani included, made some really big plays to stay in it and eventually win?

DRA GIBBS-LAWHORN: I feel like it's very important for everyone to know that we have a bunch of players on this team that can play basketball too, that are good at basketball too. Earlier in the year, things just happened to go my way, but there are multiple people on this team that can do the same thing, if not better than I can.

I told Kimani the second half, Kimani, take over. I said, just take over. That's what he did, man. We've been saying that all year.

When you have Kimani playing more than 30 minutes a game, it's going to be hard to beat us with how locked in we've been defensively. Walter Brown, Tyrin Jones, they made some big plays, blocks, and steals tonight.

We continue playing how we played defensively, then I think we have a good shot at this thing.

Q. Kimani, like you said, some huge plays down the stretch, and then some pressure-cooker free-throws. Just take me through those plays, what you were seeing, and what your mentality was?

KIMANI HAMILTON: Basically, my teammates telling me to kill, like Dra just told me. He really told me just take it over, and I just what my teammate told me to. That's all that really happened.

JOSH PASTNER: Let me just say this, we guarded the three-point shot well. They were 3 for 21. They had two

threes the first half. That one at the end of the half was just -- we over-helped in an area there. They crushed us on the offensive glass. Obviously, we talked about that. Like, you got to take the three out, which we did, and you've got to win the defensive rebound game, limit to within one shot. They crushed us on the glass. We've got to be better than that. Utah State is outstanding in that area too, so we've got to be way better than that.

You know that's a credit to Wyoming, because they play so darn hard, and they got a lot of great athletes on that perimeter there, but we did a good job guarding the three. For crying out loud, our free-throws, we got to make free-throws. That almost bit us in the rear. We got to be better about that.

Q. Dra, you kind of touched on it, but obviously, a tale of two halves for you. Was it more about Wyoming from a defensive standpoint against you in that second half, or was it more that you want to get all the guys involved and kind of approach that from an offensive standpoint from you guys in the second half?

DRA GIBBS-LAWHORN: You got to give Wyoming their credit. They played great defense on me second half. I even told the coach after the game good defensive plan. You know, with what I'm doing, that's the kind of gravity I'm going to draw, as Coach says. With that gravity I draw and bring, it's very important for me to get everyone else involved. That way at that point you can't guard us offensively.

Q. Dra, in that first half, you guys had eight straight makes at one point. What was clicking on the offensive end that allowed you to build that 16-point lead?

DRA GIBBS-LAWHORN: I would say defensively, I feel like we had two -- we had, like, two early kills, right? We had two early kills, and that comes with rebounding, communication on defense, but especially rebounding, getting the ball out, and just going, you know.

When you can play fast, especially our team when we can play fast, that's when we're at our best in transition.

Q. Kimani, on the flip side of that, a string of fouls in the second half. I think in the first five minutes or so you guys picked up eight. Kind of what went wrong in that particular stretch?

KIMANI HAMILTON: You said the fouls? I really don't know. Sometimes, I mean, y'all know we're probably being a little too physical. Sometimes ref just calling certain stuff. I don't know really know about the foul stuff issue no more.

Q. Dra, you told me that you have the utmost confidence in your teammates right now. How excited are you to move on and the opportunity to beat Utah State three times?

DRA GIBBS-LAWHORN: I'm stoked. Yeah, that's all I'm going to say. That's all I can say. I'm stoked.

Q. Kimani, I also had a question about the fouls, but you only had two fouls today, and that's better, I think, than usual for you. I noticed maybe things have switched for you defensively. What are you focusing on that end of the ball for that improvement?

KIMANI HAMILTON: I already just say just trying to keep my first foul. I feel like every game I get, like, my first two fouls or something, I end up fouling out, so my coaches just tell me keep my first foul, and I feel like that's been really helping.

Q. Then for either player, I just wanted to ask about Tyrin's impact on this game. He had so many blocks, and a lot of them were changing momentum. What did you see from him, and what was the conversation like with him on court?

DRA GIBBS-LAWHORN: It's like the same conversation we had after the last home game. You know, Tyrin is such an important player to this team. No matter how young he is, you kind of can't call him a rookie. He's like a veteran role-playing as a rookie.

Q. Dra, the coaches alluded to this several times in the press conferences after the game that you've been injured. The players have been injured this year, and you played without a point guard, Myles Che, the whole season. That's the role you've taken on, as well as the leader of the team.

Now that the season has come to an end basically, other than the conference tournament. How comfortable do you feel in that role? Is that something you relish and would want to continue as a role as a point guard?

DRA GIBBS-LAWHORN: As I said earlier in the week, and I'm going to make it clear so everyone can hear me right, no matter in college, overseas, NBA, whoever coach I play for, I will play any position, one through five. I know I'm probably never going to play the five, but one through five, I will play. That's the type of respect and love I have for whoever coaches me and my teammates.

Q. This is for both players. Is the chemistry peaking with you guys right now? Is the chemistry good

enough to win the tournament?

DRA GIBBS-LAWHORN: Yeah, I mean, as a team, when you're on a team and you're with your guys every day, the chemistry can only peak I feel like, especially if y'all like each other. We all love each other on this team.

Yeah, I mean, our chemistry has always been peaking. Since the beginning of season, it started to rise. I think it's at the perfect time now where we know each other a lot. We know how each other plays. We're kind of gelled together as a team, so I think it's going to be good for us postseason.

THE MODERATOR: We're going to dismiss the student-athletes.

Questions for Coach.

Q. I know we just wrapped up this game, but less than 24 hours away from Utah State. You guys swept them for the first time in 12 years. Just your thoughts on the Aggies.

JOSH PASTNER: We're saying a lot of prayers and thoughts for your father. Then, Cali, to your son, glad everything is okay with your son. Absolutely for you both.

There's nothing more important than health. If you have your health, you really are a true billionaire. Not a millionaire, but a billionaire, when you think about it.

Regarding Utah State, they are just, Jared Calhoun does a great job. Outstanding coach. They're a great basketball team. They're really a high-level group. I mean, any job that opens for anywhere in the country, Jared Calhoun is going to have his pick of which job that he wants. I think he does a great job.

They've got a lot of great players. They play hard. They're well-coached, and we're going to have to play our best game of the season if we want to have an opportunity to win the game.

Q. Josh, what did you like about getting Kimani on that switch in the second half and there for the final basket to win it?

JOSH PASTNER: You know, Tyler, we disagree on a lot of stuff on some of the things you write, but I do want to say I appreciate that you do show up at every press conference. I don't like it when people can just say stuff, and they don't show up and work at it and grind, so I appreciate you being there at every press conference. I disagree with a lot of things you say, but I appreciate that

you're always there.

I respect that. There's a lot of things I disagree with you on, but I respect that you show up every day.

In regards to Kimani, we wanted to get the switch on that last play. Like I said, we've been executing -- we've executed a lot at a high level late-game not only in this game, but in a lot of games, especially in the late games. We've done a nice job of our execution.

So we wanted to get a switch. We felt who we wanted to get the switch on. We got Meyer on the switch there onto Kimani, and he was able to get to the basket. It worked itself out.

Q. Then what did you like with the no center lineup that you played for most of the second half?

JOSH PASTNER: Well, Tyler, it's hard to have Tyrin off the floor. You know how it is. It's hard to have Dra off the floor. It's hard to have Kimani off the floor. The way Walter Brown was playing, he made big shots, had ten total rebounds. Obviously, Howie Fleming has had two triple-doubles this year literally in two weeks. First time in UNLV history that someone has had two triple-doubles in the same season.

The only other player that's had two career totals was Stacey Augmon; one was his freshman year, and one was his senior year. The only player in the history of UNLV basketball to have two triple-doubles is Howie Fleming.

So it's hard to have guys on the floor, but I think Jacob has been really good for us. Jacob has gotten better. If you saw where he was last year to this year and his improvement, I'm just beyond proud of Jacob, but it's just kind of how it's been with us. Sometimes we go smaller. Sometimes we got a five in there, but Jacob has been fine.

It wasn't anything with Jacob. It was just hard to take certain guys out defensively because of the shot-blocking with Tyrin.

Q. Kind of parlayed off that, Josh, the bench got shortened more and more as the season went on. I know some of that had to do with injuries, but seven players only tonight, you got to potentially play four games in four days, are you going to see the bench -- are you going to expand that a little bit?

JOSH PASTNER: Look, these guys are young guys. They just got to compete. You've got to be a competitor. You get a little tired, you look at people doing the Tour de France, they're doing eight hours on the Alps. We're in

good cardiovascular health. That's been important to me. I'm a big believer in VO2 max, cardiovascular shape. Our guys have been in good condition. Look at our guys. We play a lot of minutes for the whole season for the most part.

Earlier in the season, I was playing too many guys. I was playing a lot of guys. Part of it, we were injured. We had massive injuries. Guys weren't practicing.

Here we have a game. You're trying to figure out, okay, can this guy get in a game? We win a game, and two guys had been out for two weeks, but all of sudden, then they're cleared to play the next day in practice, and you're playing a couple of days later. It was a lot trying to figure our team out. I just think we've gotten to the point where we've settled into our rotation.

It doesn't mean other guys -- they all have to stay ready, but we've conditioned pretty hard from the beginning part of the year. I'm a big believer in -- I don't think you can be an elite player if you're not in great physical condition, VO2 max, cardio shape.

If you're not at high-level, like, training for, you know -- again, our guys aren't biking the Tour de France, but that type of mentality of being able to have that type of cardiovascular shape, you can't be an elite player.

I really believe our guys are in great physical shape. We've prepared them for that way, and they're going to have to be in great shape tomorrow. We can't worry about Friday or Saturday. We got to win tomorrow. That's going to be hard enough. Utah State is really good. Obviously, they're very well-coached. All we can focus on is on tomorrow.

Q. You talked a little bit about it. You've seen Wyoming twice this year now. What kind of sticks out to you about Sundance Wicks' program, and what kind of makes it special?

JOSH PASTNER: As I said at the very beginning when I came in here, I think they're very well-coached. I think they got really good players. I think they run good things offensively that are hard to guard. It gives them -- the way that they play, I think he's really smart offensively. Their team plays -- they play so darn hard. They've been playing as well as anybody in this league. They won five of six.

They are great on the offensive glass. They're just a really good basketball team. That's a reflection of Sundance Wicks. I just think he's a great coach. He's a high-level dude. There's no doubt about it. He's won everywhere he's been.

I mean, look, it's hard to win -- it's hard to beat him, period. Winning at Wyoming, I had altitude sickness when we were up there. It was awful. It was awful. Because of that, I told my kids, I got a bunch of little kids, and I told them you'll never go snow skiing with me, because I'm not going back to the altitude. That's ruined my experience with my children to ever take them snow skiing, because it was so bad, the altitude sickness.

A couple of our guys, before the game, were putting on oxygen masks. They had trouble breathing. We're going to really have to examine how we handle the altitude next year. I just think they're a really good program and very well-coached.

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