

# American Athletic Conference Men's Basketball Championship

Wednesday, March 13, 2024

Fort Worth, Texas, USA

Dickies Arena

**Rice Owls**

**Scott Pera**

**Travis Eevee**

**Max Fiedler**

Postgame Press Conference



MAX FIEDLER: Yeah, I would agree basically with what he said. Yeah, we got off to a good run scoring, defending, and then at the end of the half, they got in a rhythm, and that was that. I thought we did a good job trying to battle back in the second half.

**Q. What was it like coming to the bench when after all that seesaw, you get to the last six minutes of the game and it's a one-point game? Who kind of took charge in that huddle and what was the message?**

TRAVIS EVEE: I think our leaders stepped up, Max and myself, Alem too, guys that have been around for awhile and really know what it takes to win those close games. I think everyone was talking, we were all focused, and we gave ourselves a chance to win. Like you said, they had built a lead to start the second half that we had to climb back from, and then I think it was under six and it was a one-point game. So were right where we wanted to be, we had our opportunities to go win this game.

**Q. The end of a long, long career at Rice, a lot of big moments, how are you going to kind of remember this season once the sting of this loss goes away?**

MAX FIEDLER: Yeah, it's been a great five years, I'm super thankful for everything. Rice University, Rice basketball, just a lot of really, really great people. I'm just super thankful to be a part of it.

TRAVIS EVEE: Yeah, it's been great four years and this one's going to sting probably for awhile. It's not the way we wanted to go out, but I think in about a week or two weeks, whenever this wears off, I'll really be able to look back and really be thankful for everything that this university has given me, everything that these two guys next to me have given me. I'm going to miss playing with them, going to miss putting on the jersey, going to miss being in the locker room with these guys. So, yeah, looking back on this in a couple weeks I'm going to be thankful, for sure.

**Q. Coach, it's been a wild ride so far. How do you, when you step back and unpack how this year went, what are the high points you're going to take away and**

Wichita State - 88, Rice - 81

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from Coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

SCOTT PERA: Yeah, what a seesaw affair. I mean, we jumped on 'em, we were really clicking on both sides of the ball the first four, six minutes, whatever it was. They got settled in, made some shots and got back in it, and then they closed the half kind of how we started it. I was just walking over here with Travis and, you know, 13 is such a big number to come back from because you spend so much energy doing that and then every play becomes under a microscope down the stretch.

Obviously, the Rogers kid hit such huge shots. It's a credit to them, credit to him, and congratulations to Wichita State.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

**Q. Start with Travis and Max. What was it like that run on the floor where it felt like Wichita State made 19-22 shots in a row? What was it like kind of being in that moment and then to come out and have your own run in the second half?**

TRAVIS EVEE: I mean, basketball's a game of runs, right? They have great players over there, starting with Rogers. He made a lot of tough shots. I thought the defense was solid. We gave 'em a couple of looks that I wish we would want to have back. They hit some tough shots, and I think we really stayed together, heightened our focus, our energy, to climb back in it and weather that storm.



**then I guess learning points for going forward?**

SCOTT PERA: Well, the high points start with these two. Getting to coach them every day is a high point. You're talking about two of the most decorated players in the history of this school. Their names are all over the record books. They have played unbelievable basketball games. They have, in five years of Max and four years of Trav, they have given me a combined zero problems off the floor. You just, as a coach, I don't know how many guys have done this as long as I have done it, to have that good fortunate to have two kids like that, that just, every day we're about the right things, every day cared, every day were always team first. I mean, I'm just super blessed to be a part of, and have an opportunity to coach them both. We had some huge wins, we won two games, we won at Memphis. Rice had never won at Memphis before. It's a game we'll always all remember.

The game we played at UAB might be one of the best basketball games as a coach I've ever been a part of. We played near perfect. That's something we'll obviously never forget. I won't forget the game at Temple, to do that in front of friends and family of mine, hundreds of people there for that, and to win that game. So there's so many.

Then, what other things are there to learn? There's always things to learn. There's some holes that we need to plug. Like, we're losing two unbelievable players. But, you know, I'm very excited and encouraged about Andrew. I'm excited and encouraged about Iffy and Gabe and Camp and Keanu and the guys that maybe didn't play as many minutes as they wanted to this year because these guys and Alem and older guys were ahead of 'em.

If they can stay patient and now take -- get in the gym and do the things they need to do, you're going to see some really good years moving forward from kids like that. But we have got to get better defensively. The kid we have signed out of Phoenix is really going to help that. Obviously we have a couple other kids that we're involved with I think will help that. The portal is going to be important for us to find guys that do that stuff, you know, make us tougher defensively, that's going to be a critical thing, especially in this new league as many good players as there are.

**Q. You mentioned it's a tough league, and obviously a tough year, what kind of gives you confidence that you'll be able to even with losing these two guys be able to rebound next year and the future will be brighter?**

SCOTT PERA: Because I know what it takes to win at this school. It's a unique place. It's not for everybody. That's

why I love coaching here. I remember the panic when Tre Murphy and Drew Peterson transferred and everybody thought that was the end of the Rice program, and we had a better record the next year without 'em. We got guys like Travis out of the portal. Max grew up a lot. So you just find ways. When you have a culture that is strong, that these guys have established, the bricks that have been built -- I say this all the time throughout the year, when you have a strong culture and you go through a year like we've been through, and the arrows are firing at you and the bullets are coming, you're able to keep the fort afloat, you're able to keep the fort solid, you're able to keep things moving forward because you have high-character kids that are about the right stuff and that's why I know this can be fixed quickly. You watched all the games, I don't know, I don't know, 10 of 'em in the last minute, I mean, it's just uncanny the misfortune we had this year.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you very much, coach.

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