

Media Conference

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CityName, State, Country

Mickey Marez

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Boise State - 53, San Diego State - 52

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Joining us on the platform is San Diego State. Coach, your opening comments.

BRIAN DUTCHER: It was a heck of a game. Obviously, we're vastly disappointed we didn't win it. To get back to the hotel past midnight last night, come here and play at 3:00 o'clock, play as hard as we played for 40 minutes, gave our shot -- gave ourselves two shots to win the game. Unfortunately, we didn't get to convert those.

But I told the team after the game that the reason we play the season, the reason we try to win the Mountain West is to go to the NCAA Tournament. That is the crown jewel. And now that we're going, our intent is to go and win games in it.

So we're disappointed we didn't get a title. But our program plays to play in the NCAA Tournament. We have an opportunity to do that. And we will be ready to play no matter who we get in the first round.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Questions for our athletes?

Q. Matt, I'll ask you: Can you just take us through that final possession? Was the play designed for you, to take the fade-away shot?

MATT BRADLEY: I think I got a great look. You know, I got Aguek, got space, I had a wide-open lane to make a layup and I didn't finish it. So, yeah, I'd say it was designed for me to score, but unfortunately, I didn't.

Q. Matt, when you guys sometimes struggle a bit offensively as a team or points are hard to come by, does that change kind of the -- how that last possession feels, or can you, as a group, kind of wipe that away and it's a clean possession, are you thinking about what a struggle it's been offensively in trying to get points at stages in the game?

MATT BRADLEY: No, I think all of us know what we're

capable of playing the way we were supposed to. We were confident in the second half, even though we struggled in the first. But, you know, we want to win the game ultimately. And regardless of who takes that last shot, we're all hoping -- we all have full trust that it's going to go in. I had it right at the rim and I missed. Yeah, I don't think it affected me. I just think I missed it.

Q. Lamont, I think you had a career high today. As it got down to the final few minutes, did you feel like maybe there might be a little momentum finally, or was it just kind of a grind all day?

LAMONT BUTLER: No, we had got momentum going into the second half. I mean, I felt we all had a hell of a game, you know, defensively. And then offensively, we got it going in the second half. And that's all -- we just got to finish at the end. And that's what it came down to.

Q. Matt, can you just describe like what this season has meant, just playing at San Diego State for your last year and what it will mean seeing your team's name called on selection Sunday?

MATT BRADLEY: It means a lot, you know. I've never been in an opportunity like this just to play in the Mountain West championship and going to play in the NCAA Tournament. So regardless of not winning tonight, I'm really proud of this team and them taking me in and the stuff we've done this year and stuff we're going to continue to do in the tournament. Yeah, it means a lot.

Q. Aguek, I want to direct this question towards you. This is obviously a very tough and, obviously, a very heartbreaking loss for you guys. And now with the NCAA Tournament coming up, how are you and your teammates going to recover in time for the next game?

AGUEK AROP: I mean, obviously, this -- this loss hurts. We're going to let it hurt, but we're not going to -- we're not going to have a hangover about it. We're not going to let it drag us down, especially going in the NCAA



Tournament. We're going to be need great energy, positive vibes.

So we'll let this one hurt, but let it motivate us as we go in the tournament. We don't want to feel like this ever again. We'll use that to launch us into the tournament.

Q. Matt, apologize if you've been asked this, but could you just take us through the last play and what you saw and how much contact there was on any of those plays?

MATT BRADLEY: Yeah, I think, you know, I made a move on Akot and I had space to just go down the lane and make a layup and, you know, foul or not, I should have made it. I was right at the rim. I missed two earlier layups the same way.

Yeah, I should have made it, I got the rebounded and Trey had a great look, too. We had two great looks at the end of it, but I definitely should have finished mine.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Time for a couple questions for our athletes if we have some. Okay, thank you gentlemen.

Now we'll entertain questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, can you just explain, like, what this competition during the Mountain West Tournament and the season just prepared you guys for the NCAA Tournament? You guys played one of the best bigs in Orlando Robinson the first round, a tough Colorado State team and, of course, Boise in the championship game. Can you just describe how those tests can help you guys moving forward?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, we've played in three close games. And close games are what you're going to play in March. So each one of these games gave us a different look, a different feel. I thought we defended really well in all three of them.

Obviously, we put them on the line too much. I think it was a 21-11 free-throw discrepancy, and that cost us. And they didn't make them all, or it could have been worst. But they got to the line more than we did.

We know they're going to be close games. We relied on our defense, it gave us a chance to win the game. And we had as two good a looks as you're going to get with the game in the line. Matt Bradley down the middle for a layup, Trey Pulliam to his runner to win the game. We had two looks to win the game. Unfortunately, we didn't make either one. But that's basketball. But like I said, we can't dwell on that.

The most joy in the season is coming up in the NCAA Tournament. And like I said, we want to win conference titles. That's -- every time we take the floor, we're trying to win the Mountain West title.

But I also know we've won the title one year by three games, regular season, didn't go to the NCAA Tournament and that felt hollow even though we hung a banner.

So the reason we play in the conference we play in and the reason we try to win all these games is to go to the NCAA Tournament. And so now we have to embrace that, we have to, obviously, be disappointed tonight that we didn't hang a banner. But we have to put it in the rearview mirror tomorrow. We have to have excitement, energy, knowing that the best basketball is yet to come.

Q. Coach, you've been involved in a lot of physical battles in this conference over the years. Where would you rank this just as far as the physicality of this basketball game from start to finish?

BRIAN DUTCHER: It was a hard-fought game. Both teams are really good defensively. You know, nothing comes easy. And I thought both teams competed at a really high level. Obviously, important plays were made on both sides, important stops were made on both sides. And it came down to -- we had two shots to win the game and we couldn't make either one of them.

So it was -- the difference in all three games is our one-possession games and they got all three of them. So congratulations, Boise State. They have a really good team, they're well coached. They compete at a high level, like we do. And they got us this year.

So congratulations to Leon and his team. But we're going to get ourselves ready for the tournament.

Q. Dutch, can you describe when you get down to a final possession like that to win the game and teams are clearly going to look at Matt and defend Matt, how do you approach that and what is the challenge when a lot of people are looking for Matt to get the ball and take that kind of shot?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, I actually ran the play for Trey. Pulliam, I ran -- wanted hit him off a ball screen downhill, try to see if he could create a shot for himself, Nate or a teammate. As he drove in there, he found Matt, kicked it out. Matt played a closeout, attack to the basket, got reach to the front of the rim. You can't get a better place for him than at the front of the rim shooting

over a defender. He had a clean look.

Nate did a great job getting the offensive rebound. He kicked it right up top to Trey, and he shot faked, took the one dribble floater. That's his shot. So we had two shots, I thought, were as good as we're going to get in that situation to win the game. Unfortunately, didn't get either one to go in.

Q. It seemed like your three-point shooting -- it seemed more selective in the second half. You guys were almost perfect. Was there a message to the team about being more selective, or what kind of led to those shots?

BRIAN DUTCHER: No, Lamont shot the ball great. I thought Chad Baker turned down some three-point looks he had for the one dribble pull-up. And we tried to encourage him. But you get that open look, you're a shooter, take that three.

But, I mean, there were tired legs on both sides. It's not an excuse. Both teams played on extremely short rest. And it's hard to shoot on tired legs. That's obvious to anybody. So whether that affected us to a degree, I don't know.

But both teams gutted it out. You just knew what it was going to be. It wasn't going to be real pretty today, both teams having played yesterday, night games. Obviously, we didn't get back until midnight or later. And to play at 3:00, we knew what it was going to be.

We were just hoping mentally we could fight through and give ourselves a chance to win, which we did. We gave ourselves a chance to win the game, but didn't make the shot with the game on the line.

Q. Dutch, obviously, your attention now turns to the NCAA Tournament and Mountain West will have three, possibly four teams in. How important is this tournament in terms of the perception of this league going forward? It's one and seven in its last eight first-round games in the NCAA tournament. How important is it for teams not to just get there but to win games?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, we have to find a way to win games. Obviously, it's harder because we're not going to have high, high seeds. I don't think anybody in the conference is going to get a seed that is -- you know, maybe we'll get a six if we're lucky, maybe.

But then when you play when you're playing seven, eight, nine seeds, that makes it harder, you know?

So there's always hope you get a high seed. And we had

a high seed last year and I thought we had a favorable matchup with Syracuse because we shoot the ball so well.

And no one zoned us all year, and then we ran in their zone and we couldn't make a shot. So sometimes you got to just be careful what you wish for.

Whoever you play, you got to prepare as best you can and then go out there and play with incredible confidence knowing that you're good.

THE MODERATOR: We have time for one more question.

Q. Dutch, what's the difference between winning and losing a title game here in terms of the mental approach for those guys in the NCAA tournament? Do you have to talk them through some things to get -- can they hit the reset button after a loss like this or is that a different kind of thing you have to approach mentally?

BRIAN DUTCHER: No, we can set the reset button. It actually felt like we were a Power 5 conference this year. You know, so many times we go into this game and we know have to win just to get in.

And so, we're -- like, you look at all these teams, the Big Ten, the ACC, SEC, all the top seeds are getting knocked out. They know that they're there to play in March in the NCAA tournament.

So as badly as I wanted to win this game to hang a banner, I wanted to win it to have a higher seed so we could get seeded higher so we could have a chance to win games in the NCAA tournament. That's the ultimate goal.

We came here all these years ago and we still preach the message, we're here to play for a national championship, we're here to go to a Final Four. So our ultimate goal is to get to the tournament and give ourselves a chance to do that.

So that's the biggest goal. So winning the Mountain West is just a step toward that final goal.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Thanks, everybody.