

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Four

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UD Arena

San Diego State Aztecs

Coach Brian Dutcher

Nick Boyd

Miles Byrd

Jared Coleman-Jones

Media Conference



Q. Nick, when you think about the last couple of years for you having the opportunity to play in the NCAA Tournament, but to join an entire new team and then you look at the overall youth on this team, what was it like to get to this point in your first year at San Diego State?

NICK BOYD: Oh, man, it was important to me. That's why I came here, to win. Obviously, like you said, we have a young team, but it just shows our character as a team, a bunch of guys who have grit, have fight, and we're going to have to take them characteristics to the game tomorrow.

Like Jared said, gratifying, but we've got to do more work.

Q. Miles, I have here in the notes from a year ago, just 8 percent of scoring back from last year's team, and to get all the way to the NCAA Tournament, what does it say about San Diego State's program?

MILES BYRD: Just the standard we have at San Diego State. Lost of guys the year before last year; lost a lot of guys last year. For us to be able to come back here three years in a row after a lot of new teams and a lot of new faces on the team, it just shows the work that Coach Dutch and our assistants do to get us ready for this point.

Q. You guys have a great resume coming into the tournament at the First Four. However, only playing UNC twice in men's basketball history. How is this team preparing to face a legacy team like the Tar Heels?

MILES BYRD: Yeah, I think I just seen somewhere that we're 0-2 all time against UNC and the last time I think we played was 1990. A lot of different identities. They've had a new coach in there since the last time we played, obviously. We have a whole new team.

I think, yeah, just us prepping for any other basketball game. They're a really talented team, a really good group, but I think so are we. It's just about how we prepare coming into the game tomorrow.

NICK BOYD: I just think it's a mindset. I don't even feel like -- yesterday we got our name called, so we didn't have much time to prepare, but it just comes down to a mindset,

THE MODERATOR: Jared, talk about your excitement seeing yuck name called last night.

JARED COLEMAN-JONES: It's my first time to the dance so there's a lot of excitement to be with this group. It's a young group. I've formed a bond with them that's unbreakable. So for this to be the first time going with them, it's great.

NICK BOYD: Like he said, it was exciting to see our name get called. A lot of people didn't think we'd be in this position right here, so we're not taking it for granted, and we're ready to get out, have some fun and make some noise.

MILES BYRD: I'd say it's a lot more nerve-racking this year. The past two years we were able to come into the tournament as a 5 seed, so a little bit more uncertain this time around.

But we're all grateful to be in this position, and we know how happy a lot of college basketball players would be to be here right now.

Q. Curious, Jared, when you made the decision to join San Diego State, I'm sure envisioned or hoped to reach the NCAA Tournament. How gratifying is that a half a year or year later?

JARED COLEMAN-JONES: Super gratifying. It's a dream come true. But there's a lot of work to be done, so I'm super excited, but I know there's a different type of approach we're going to have to take postseason.



what's your mind going to be like out there.

At the end of the day whoever has the mental strength as well as the physical strength to keep going throughout the game, the highs and lows, is going to be on top.

JARED COLEMAN-JONES: You know, for me, I just think, and to agree with them, it's just a mindset, going out there, preparing, watching film, getting a lot of mental reps before this game.

I think that we're a very talented team, and we can take on whatever anybody throws at us. So just preparing for it and being ready for the challenge.

Q. Miles and Nick, having gone through tournament games previously, what's it like in that first game in a new tournament in terms of just being prepared and ready for what it takes to get through that initial game?

MILES BYRD: I think with us just setting the tone, be the first one to hit on every shot, lock in defensively like we always do. Yeah, and just play freely.

Coach Dutch always says that players make plays in March. A lot of it's going to come down to us at the end of the game. Sets can only get us so far, and at the end of the day we just need to be ready to play a competitive game versus a really good team.

NICK BOYD: Like he said, players make plays, but at the same time I feel like a lot of these tournament games, you play a team that you're so unfamiliar with, so it's kind of hard to really prep and be ready in terms of an X's and O's standpoint.

I just think it comes down to a mindset, like he said, hitting on the first shot, just setting the tone. If you do that, you give yourself a chance to start a run.

Q. For Nick, this is your first year as an Aztec for San Diego State. How are you feeling coming into the First Four initially?

NICK BOYD: I'm feeling blessed. I'm excited to be here. I feel like last year with my team, obviously we had a great team, but we kind of took these moments for granted. That was ultimately what I was thinking.

Before the selection show yesterday, whatever it is, whatever happens, can't take none of these moments for granted because it's very hard to get in these seats right here, have an opportunity to play on the biggest stage.

I'm feeling blessed and I'm just excited and happy that I

could go out there, play with these guys again, get another shot at that, and ultimately play for my family.

Q. With a young team like you guys have, how do you handle the highs and lows throughout the season?

JARED COLEMAN-JONES: I think it's one thing, it's like you can never get too high or too low. It's all about a mindset and just having the will to push through when you have a great game, learning what you can do better from a great game and learning what you can do better from a bad game.

It's just all about just staying even keel and really focusing on what you can be better at and growing through everything.

NICK BOYD: Man, I keep saying the same thing, but I think it's just like your everyday approach. Whether you win or you lose, how you're going to come into practice the next day. Are you going to come in there ready to bust your butt or take a day off?

This group, we do a good job of competing and just having fight. I think we've been through some highs and lows throughout the season. Obviously beating one of the best teams in the country and then lost a couple at home, too, we've seen both sides of it.

But just the ability to come back the next day and fighting in practice gave us this opportunity right here.

MILES BYRD: I agree with Nick. We kind of have a mindset at San Diego State; it's win, lose, draw, we still work. We've lost some games that we feel like as a group we shouldn't have lost, but I never think that takes our intent away from practice the next day or whenever our next practice is.

I think every time we get the group inside the gym, which is our practice facility, we're ready to get in there and get better, take steps further as a group.

I think that helps us out as the year goes on.

Q. Nick, you mentioned beating one of the best in the country. When San Diego State is at its best, what's that look like for the Aztecs and your way of going about wins?

NICK BOYD: Man, I could go down the line. I think playing with swagger ultimately. Our defense is something that's a given. We're going to come every night and guard for 40 minutes.



But more on the offensive end being ourselves, Miles Byrd hitting a step-back three or Jared making a good pass or getting a dunk. Magoon blocking shots on the other end; BJ Davis picking up the best guards in the country full court.

And then we've got guys off the bench with our two freshmen who come in and handle business. That's what we're at our best when we're playing with joy and we have that swagger about us and that edge.

Q. Jared, you mentioned this is your first trip to the dance. Growing up and then also just watching March Madness, do you have a favorite tournament moment?

JARED COLEMAN-JONES: I'm not going to lie, Villanova buzzer beater. That was amazing to me. I used to fantasize about hitting a buzzer beater for a championship game, just being in a flow state, being prepared enough to knock that shot down. It's a crazy feeling.

I'm trying to get there right now, and it's my first time, so we're going to see what it do.

Q. Nick, your favorite March Madness moment?

NICK BOYD: Sheesh. I'd probably just have to say -- it's kind of hard, but I'd say obviously going to the Final Four was exciting; dream come true.

Then obviously having a buzzer beater in the first round against Memphis at the last couple seconds -- I don't know if it was a buzzer beater but last one second. Yeah, that's probably my two right there.

MILES BYRD: Yeah, I think probably the Final Four game winner. I was on the team. It happened to be against Nick's team, but I think that was one of my favorite sports memories I've been a part of. That and Villanova. Obviously my dad went to Villanova, played at Villanova, so he was at that game. I remember watching it on TV, and that was a pretty magical moment, as well.

Q. I probably asked you each this in the preseason, but how surreal is it for Miles and Nick specifically having been on the floor at the same time in the Final Four in Houston to now be teammates in an NCAA Tournament together? I know you envisioned this when you got together six or eight months ago. How surreal is it?

MILES BYRD: I think it's just the everyday work. I think we've seen this play and unfold for the past however long. I think on this visit I was one of his hosts and we talked about stuff like that.

We've both seen it before and we're both trying to reach that big stage again. Once you get there, you kind of crave that feeling again.

I would definitely feel like we've both got that hunger to get back there.

NICK BOYD: Yeah, like he said, it is surreal though, because I never thought I'd probably be in this position right now, especially playing a team that knocked us off in such a harsh way.

It's just surreal. I'm just proud. I'm really proud of this team, and that's all I can really think about. Just even yesterday, I just want this moment -- when we lost against Boise in Las Vegas I was so upset because I just wanted this moment right here for this team because I know what type of bonds it creates and what it can do for guys forever.

It's surreal, and it was just funny that it all worked out this way. I'm just grateful and blessed.

Q. Obviously guys traveled here on short notice a long distance. Does that affect the way you prepare and approach this game?

MILES BYRD: No, I don't think so. I think we're a really youthful group who's got a good mentality about it. I can remember there was a game earlier in the year where we were supposed to play Cal and supposed to fly out the day before the game. The flight gets delayed. Then it gets canceled. We drive up to LA to try to fly out of LA that night and it didn't work, and we ended up flying in maybe two or three hours before the game started and we ended up going and playing one of our better games of the season.

I wouldn't say adversity is going to make us play better instantly, but I think our team does a good job of rallying around each other for moments like this.

NICK BOYD: Yeah, like he said, I think the same. I think it kind of helps us in a sense. Like he said, we're youthful. Sometimes scouting reports can be a lot for a guys who it's a big moment, we're in March Madness. And when you simplify it that we've just got to go out there and play, I think sometimes that works in our favor, and that's something I'm looking forward to.

JARED COLEMAN-JONES: Yeah, like they said, it's about just locking in and watching the scout and watching the players -- whatever it's called. We were on the plane and we were all just watching the scout and we were watching the sets and refreshing our minds.



I think that just locking in and having been through that adversity before, flying out and getting stuck in airports and not being able to fly out the day before, I just feel like it's prepared us for this moment. We'll be good.

Q. You touched on this a little bit earlier, but what do you guys think the identity of this team is, and how is that going to end up contributing to success in the tournament?

JARED COLEMAN-JONES: I think our identity is in our defense and our effort. I think that if we play really good defense and we play with effort and we play with swagger, I think everything else is going to handle itself, honestly.

NICK BOYD: Like he said, I want to be the hardest playing team in this tournament. If we do that, I think we'll like where we're at and we'll have a chance to beat a good UNC team tomorrow night.

MILES BYRD: If we play defense and defensive rebound, I think it gives us a pretty good chance against any team in the country. Like Nick and Jared both said earlier, when we bring the swag and that freedom and confidence to the game that we can and we're capable of doing, I think it gives us a good chance against anybody.

Q. San Diego State has obviously had a lot of success looking over the last few years, and so has the Mountain West. Boise State gets left out this year, but they were here a year ago in the First Four. Miles, how tough is the Mountain West conference?

MILES BYRD: Yeah, I don't think people on the East Coast really understand what the Mountain West is really about. I think every game you've got to go in there and it's going to be a grind. There's a lot of physical teams in the Mountain West, a lot of them whose identities kind of revolve around rebounding like Boise State.

One of the biggest things that people don't take into account is the altitude that you play in. Most of the away teams have altitude at their gyms. As a team from sea level you're going out to Utah State to play in the mountains and then you're going to Colorado State to play in the mountains, that has a little bit of effect, as well.

I don't know how they take into account or whatever, the committee, but I think that's one of the things that gets left untouched or untalked about.

JARED COLEMAN-JONES: Like Miles said, it's very physical. People just really identify our rebounding. Coach has been preaching us to that all year, defensive

rebounding, offensive rebounding, establishing ourselves in the paint.

To touch on altitude, I think it's a big thing. I remember going to -- I know Wyoming is pretty high, but Air Force is the one that affected me the most. I think the gym was super cold and it's connected to an ice rink or something like that. The air was thin, it was cold.

We had to mentally lock in for every game, and it's a grind. It's a long rough season and you have to really take care of your body and be prepared for the next game.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, just a statement of this team and what they've been able to do this year and making it here to March Madness and the NCAA Tournament.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Just excited to be here. We lost 90 percent of our scoring, 90 percent of our minutes from a year ago. So basically a new team. Found its way through a hectic season and we're playing in March. That's a great accomplishment.

We're proud of our efforts. We're proud of the way we finished the season, and we're proud to be here in Dayton representing San Diego State University.

Q. Dutch, what type of challenge is it hearing your name called Sunday, traveling and playing Tuesday, knowing that this is part of the tournament setting, sometimes you play with one day prep after winning a game or a conference tournament, you play multiple games in multiple days. What kind of experience and turnaround is this for you?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I've been coming to this event for a long time, and this is something brand new. I've been to four National Championship games, three at Michigan as an assistant, one as a head coach at San Diego State, but I've never been in the First Four. So this is a new experience. It's rapid. Coaches are overthinkers anyway, so we always complain and worry we don't have enough time to get ready.

But at the end of the day, March is for players. Our guys will be ready. We'll give them a game plan tomorrow morning and we'll play tomorrow night.

We didn't get a chance to practice. We didn't have our flight confirmed, I think, until like 9:30 last night. Met at the arena at 8:15; flew out at 9:00; had to come to the public practice.

And so they watched a little tape on the plane; we sat down after a quick meal at the hotel and watched



individuals. So we're just in the infancy of a game plan.

So tomorrow morning will be critical, concentrating. And that's why these conference tournaments are always so good, because you play three games in three days so you're used to quick prep. So we will quick prep and be ready to play tomorrow night.

Q. Players before you had mentioned about offensive rebounding and defensive rebounding. How do you ensure that the defensive strategies for North Carolina?

BRIAN DUTCHER: We've gotten beat because we can't rebound the ball. That's why Boise beat us. I think they shot 33 percent from the field and 27 percent from three and got a victory because we couldn't rebound the ball.

So that's been an Achilles heel all year, so we concentrate on it, we talk about it, now we have to do it if we want to win at the highest level. Obviously North Carolina presents a lot of problems. They're fast. They run. They put a lot of points on the board.

We have to find a way to make it a lower scoring game. It can't be up in the 80s and 90s. We have to play in the 70s if we want to have a chance to win.

Q. Dutch, how have you adapted without Magoon over the last six games, and what are you hoping for his impact to be in the game tomorrow night?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, I became a worse coach without Magoon, so hopefully I'll be a good coach again. Magoon is our freshman big. He was freshman of the year in the Mountain West Conference, Defensive Player of the Year in the Mountain West Conference, and he's been out of action since February 22, I believe, so basically six games.

He got hurt two minutes into the Utah State game. So now he practiced full yesterday, limited reps but full go, and so our intention is to have him on the court tomorrow and see what kind of difference he'll make for the Aztecs.

Q. Your players were up here, they were talking about the Mountain West Conference, and one thing I thought was interesting was elevation. For you, you've highlighted this, being around basketball for a long time. One, elevation and the significance of that at that point in the league; but then also just the toughness of your league and what we've seen here in the last decade.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, playing at altitude is very difficult. Our biggest jump as a program is when we got rid

of travel partners because we'd have to spend three and four days at altitude to play that second game.

Now if we play at altitude, we try to get out the next day, get home, and before we go back and play another game at altitude. So it usually takes 24 to 36 hours you have the best chance to play. If you stay beyond that, it takes two weeks to acclimate.

You look at your team sometimes and you say, why are we running a quick sign? Why are we a half step slow to everything? It's usually the altitude. A half step slow will get you beat. And the other teams know that.

New Mexico, Air Force, Wyoming, they all post in the locker room the signs of altitude sickness, so they use it as a psychological tool. I don't think anyone in the country is dealing with that other than us and others that play in the Mountain West, but we're playing at 7,000 feet, and it makes a difference.

We've been tough enough to endure it, so find ways to win in these hard environments against good teams, too. I'm not saying the only reason we get beat is altitude. They've got good teams and they're playing at altitude, so that makes it doubly tough sometimes in the Mountain West.

I don't think people in the nation really appreciate what that's like.

Q. In a short period of time you've had since you found out it's North Carolina, when you see the job Hubert Davis has done, what do you see from North Carolina that sticks out on film?

BRIAN DUTCHER: They're talented. They're fast. They can score the basketball at an elite level. I looked at their schedule, and I thought we played a tough schedule, but you look at who they played. It's Auburn, Alabama, Florida, Michigan State, Duke three times -- you're talking about all the No. 1 and 2 seeds in the tournament.

Yeah, they would have liked to win some of those games, but those are really good teams. Coach Davis has done a great job holding them together through some tough losses and they're playing their best basketball, which you want to do.

That's a sign of a really good coach, when your team plays its best basketball in March, and I think North Carolina is playing its best basketball in March.

Q. You mentioned the earlier loss to Boise State in the conference tournament. How do you rebound from a loss like that to get ready for a win-or-go-home game?

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BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, that was tough. I think it was 17 years since we haven't got out of the quarterfinals game, and I've been the head coach eight years and played in the championship game seven times.

So we're used to winning in the Mountain West tournament and that didn't happen. Boise has got a good team. Obviously they played differently against us in order to win. They took 40 threes. I think that's a high for the year, and they got a lot of the misses.

We went back, we emphasized rebounding again is the thing we have to do at an elite level if we want to win, because we do guard hard. We're pretty efficient offensively. We're playing better down the stretch offensively, and we have to rebound the ball if we want to be really good in March.

Q. A follow-up to that question, in looking back to the Mountain West Conference tournament, did you have an idea in your head where it was kind of a win-and-in situation, and where you sort of fell last night in seeing your name called and being on the bubble?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, it was tough. We try to take care of all the things we can when we schedule. We played the seventh toughest non-conference schedule in the country this year because we know that's important to the committee.

And even that being said, with wins over Houston and Creighton and then our crosstown team UCSD who won both regular season conference tournament and the Big West. We were one of the last two teams in.

We have to continue to study what the committee is looking at and schedule appropriately. We want to play the toughest schedule we can play, but sometimes that's hard. The better we are, the less teams want to play us.

The NIL event worked out great for us in Vegas. It gave us three really good games. Obviously we have losses this year to Gonzaga and Oregon, so we continue to try to schedule up to put ourselves in a position where we can play in March based on what we do in the non-conference and trying to have a good Mountain West record.

Q. You touched on it, but when you consider what you've overcome to get here, when Reese Waters goes down, you can't prepare for this. Weeks in front of your season you lose a veteran pivotal piece from a team last year that was in the Sweet 16; you lose Magoon Gwath. You've played six underclassmen with eligibility all year long. What does it say about this

group that they've reached this point with an opportunity to do more?

BRIAN DUTCHER: That they're gritty, they're tough, they have something about them that -- we went on more scoring runs this year than I've ever seen in my career. Down 18, 19 points and go on a 17-0 run, 20-0 run, 18-0 run all in one season.

They've got a toughness about them, when things aren't going right, that they don't give in, that they find a way to continue to fight for 40, and that's allowed us to have some success.

They're young. They make young mistakes. But it's not a lack of effort. It's not a lack of fight. That's what's allowed us to be sitting here today.

Q. Has there been something that's surprised you about this group?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, sometimes I say it's like coaching and sometimes it's like babysitting. When it's coaching, we're better. When I'm babysitting, it's harder. They're young, but they're getting better. They're getting better.

Hopefully in the NIL era, I can return this team next year. I've got a lot of really good players that are supposed to come back next year, and we'll grow from this year, try to make a run this year, and then be better next year.

Q. How do you make sure the players are mentally prepared knowing one loss could end the season?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, that's the beauty of this year. The ending is so sudden no matter how much you know it's one-and-done. When you go in the locker room and the season is over, it's devastating, whether it's losing to Connecticut two years ago in the championship game or losing to Connecticut last year in the Sweet 16.

Over the last two years we're seven in UConn. We ran into them twice and they're the national champs. Hopefully we can continue that run and find UConn in the bracket somewhere down the road and get our revenge.

But winning in March is hard. I remember our first -- my first head coaching NCAA victory, everybody was so happy for me, and I was more happy for the kids.

I've never been like that. I just like those moments where you can see them celebrate, when you can see them see their name come up on the TV, and then to be there for them when things don't go right, when you lose a game

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you don't feel you should have.

That's all part of coaching and that's all part of the journey we're all on together.

Q. Amongst the experience, this time of the year and being able to advance, you've had a lot -- well, part of it. What is sort of the biggest takeaway and telling your group, especially this young group, of sort of what to be prepared for?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Just play with swagger. Don't be afraid. I don't want to lose with a scared team. So that might open it up for some mistakes, some wild shots. They might interpret that as being crazy. But you can't win being scared.

We'll go out there and I'll live with some shots they take, as long as we're competing at a high level, defending the way I know we can. And I'll live with a shot or two that people might be watching from the stands or the sidelines saying, what is he doing?

But I want them confident. You can't win in March unless you're confident, and I want a confident group out there tomorrow night.

Q. Conditioning-wise, and that plays a big part, how deep do you go in your bench during this time of year?

BRIAN DUTCHER: We've been going nine or ten deep all year. With Magoon, we go 10 deep, and we'll go 10 deep tomorrow. The way we play defense and what we ask them to do, you can't play that way for 40 if you're on the floor the whole time.

So we try to pick the ball up, try to pressure, try to compete at a high level. So we've been deep all year, and we'll continue to play deep tomorrow.

Q. Talking about Magoon's status and looking ahead towards tomorrow, just what you've seen from him here in an incredible freshman year. Did you expect his impact and what he's been able to do immediately stepping on the stage of the college game?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, we redshirted Magoon last year, so we knew kind of what we had. I think Magoon is potentially an NBA player. To do that as a freshman is hard to do. But he's gotten better as the season has gone on, and until he got hurt, arguably he was playing the best basketball of his career the last eight games.

Smart, staying out of foul trouble, blocking shots, scoring from every level, three, in the post, off the dribble. We'll

see how he does. He's missed a lot of basketball. Just to throw him out there and expect he's going to be perfect is hard to do.

But we're not going to win in March unless he's really good. So that's why we want to make sure first and foremost he was healthy and now we've got to hope that he can catch up timing-wise to the game as it goes having not played for three weeks.

Q. You've had a lot of success playing at home. You won 12 games this year, 14 last year. What is it about San Diego State that makes you have so much success on your home floor?

BRIAN DUTCHER: It's a lot like the Dayton environment. We have great home crowds. We're sold out on the season. We have a great student section. When we're not playing well, the crowd gets behind us. They don't get on us. They motivate us to play harder. They're a huge difference in our success.

The Mountain West has some great home court environments. Utah State is incredible; The Pit in New Mexico is incredible; Colorado State sold out; Boise. We play in some of the best environments in the country.

Every coach feels his conference is the hardest to play in because it's the one he's in. But the Mountain West has got great fan bases that really support their teams, and it's a challenge to win games in our conference.

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