

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 15, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Boise State Broncos

Coach Leon Rice

Tyson Degenhart

R.J. Keene

Postgame Press Conference

Colorado State 69, Boise State 56

LEON RICE: It was a hard-fought tournament and really, really proud of the effort of our guys to get to this game and battle through the two great teams we battled through to get here.

Hats off to Colorado State. They're playing great basketball. They're 12 for 24 from 3. And that's hard to do on the third day, make shots like they're doing. They're into their roles. They know what they're doing. They're moving the ball well, and they're really playing well.

I think we're really playing well. I think you saw two of the teams that are playing really, really good right now, and I don't mean that as any disrespect to what New Mexico did to win the league. That gets -- that day and age, that gets underappreciated because we played a 20-game schedule and you grind through. Everybody played everybody. Even playing field. They won the league. Kudos there. It's quite an accomplishment.

But you look at us going into today, won 11 out of 13, playing great. I don't want that tough night to take away from what these guys have done to battle to get here.

But in the end, you know, we won two games never shooting over 40 percent down here, and basketball's a game of made shots. And in the end, it comes down to that. They go 12 for 24 from 3. We go 8 for 27. And, you know, we shoot 38 for the -- from the field and 29 from 3. And, you know, they shoot 43 and 50.

So in the end, that's too much to overcome against a really good team.



Q. To come this close and come up short in this game, what are your emotions like right now?

TYSON DEGENHART: Sucks. I mean, we fought through two incredibly tough games on Thursday and Friday. I thought this was our chance. I thought we were the team in destiny this week. Just didn't have it today and just Colorado State played very, very well this past month or so so hats off to them.

R.J. KEENE: Yeah, definitely stinks. We had a goal coming in here, that we wanted to win it all. And we took it one game at a time, and we didn't really look forward to any others. It stings. We wanted to win this bad. We had two good wins and we really wanted to get this one today but fell short.

Q. With how emotional the last two wins were, how hard you had to fight, how much did you have left in the tank today?

TYSON DEGENHART: We gave it our all. That's what you have to do in these tournaments. We're playing for a NCAA Tournament bid. If you don't give it your all, it's a disservice to your team, your teammates, your fans. So we gave it our all and we came up short, and that's sometimes the way it goes.

Q. Coach mentioned the outside shooting. How big was that, obviously, and the 12 of 24 they had. They had a stretch where they hit three or four in a row to open up the lead.

TYSON DEGENHART: It was a big stretch, the one in the first half where they made a bunch. Born came in, went 3 for 4. And Keshawn Williams went 2 for 3. Five threes off the bench, it's hard to do that. Morton played very well, 11 points off the bench. When you have those guys come in and do that, it's hard to overcome.

Q. Tyson, were they just making big plays? Was it something they were doing? What happened?

TYSON DEGENHART: It's sometimes how basketball



works. They did a good job of pressuring us and not allowing us to get paint touches. Along with that, they moved the ball well. Credit to them, they made shots. That's kind of the way basketball goes sometimes.

Q. And then you guys take 49 shots, 27 are from 3. Statistically, looking at a team shooting from 3 this year, was it a case of chasing the game? Was that the game plan?

TYSON DEGENHART: I think most were probably open. I think there were some instances where we got the shot clock down and probably didn't get the best look. But sometimes it's just the way the flow of the game goes. It was harder to get in the paint. So we had to shoot some from the outside. That's kind of the way the cookie crumbles.

Q. Tyson, going into Selection Sunday, how do you feel?

TYSON DEGENHART: I don't know. It's definitely different than the past couple years. Freshman year, obviously, we won this. It was a great feeling, punching the ticket. Last two years, we felt pretty good about where we were at. Now it's just -- you kind of just hope and pray. I feel like we are a tournament team. If the committee says like what they did last year about out-of-conference wins, we have two of the best ones out there. Hope that takes us in. We'll just have to wait and see tomorrow.

Q. R.J., I'll ask you the same question. As Coach Rice pointed out, you guys won 11 of 13. Over that span, you've found your roles, you specifically. Do you think you guys deserve a spot in the tournament?

R.J. KEENE: Yes, I think we do deserve a spot in the tournament. Like Tyson said, those Clemson wins, St. Mary's win, New Mexico wins, San Diego State wins, I think we have six wins in the tournament. Things bubble teams don't have. It speaks to our guys and the way we compete. The committee can do what we want. I think we're a valuable team for them and I think we're a great team and deserve to be in the tournament.

Q. You guys cut the deficit to five points early in the second half, and then they just opened it up with 11-0 run. When you get that close and then they go on a run like that, how much of a back-breaker is that?

TYSON DEGENHART: It's hard. Obviously, basketball is a game of runs, but there's some stats out there, if you have, like, two 11-plus runs in a game, your winning percentage is like 80 percent or something like that. Talking about a 25-3 run in the first half and 11-0 in the

second half, that's pretty hard to overcome. That's a 33-point swing.

If we could have shortened those runs a little bit, I think we'd have been in a better spot.

THE MODERATOR: We'll dismiss the student-athletes at this time. Thank you.

Q. Leon, what did you see in terms of how hard these guys had to fight the last two days and put so much out there the last two days? Did they run out of gas at all today?

LEON RICE: We don't make excuses. There's a lot to that. When you're going through the season, you play Wednesday, Saturday after a hard-fought Wednesday game, these guys are dead on Thursday. And to do it three days in a row is tough. But it's not an excuse.

That's just the way it is. So that's why I tried to get some more guys. Julian came in and helped us. We needed that because I knew Al puts a lot on himself. But, man, he had to battle for 80 minutes, basically, against two teams that dogged him the whole, you know, the whole night for 80 minutes.

One game, he had 12 assists. He was spectacular. So he'll beat himself up for a night like this, but that's a lot on a guy to do it three nights in a row against a defense that's loaded up for him.

Again, it's a made shot game. If our offense could have been a little better, but we're running in sand a little bit, looked a little step slow. Tried to do some different things, and got to give them credit. They're playing great. Everything you tried to do, they were able to go inside, came double, they made threes. Don't, they foul pressure on you and get to the line and all that kind of stuff.

So you have to play a really, an A-plus game not just with effort, not just with toughness, but you've got to make some shots in a game like this to keep it close. Then who knows what happens in the end.

But we weren't able to keep it close.

Q. John mentioned you cut it to 5 to start the second half. It's like here they come again. Then there's a 50/50 call and they get the free throws. And bam, bam, bam, three 3s in a row. How tough was that?

LEON RICE: Because you felt like here we go again. Credit to them. They responded and hit big shots.

Q. Leon, just going into Selection Sunday, how do you feel? Do you feel like this team is an NCAA Tournament team?

LEON RICE: Oh, no doubt. It's so funny when you're in a situation like ours. I mean, let's look at it logically. We aggressively schedule every year. We went out and had two of the best wins around, you know, two top 20 teams. One that was ranked 10 last I saw. St. Mary's is in the top 18 or so. Great wins. One of them was on a neutral, one on them was at home. We've had road wins. We check all the boxes. We have neutral site wins. Two great ones here. All the boxes are checked is what they say they want to do.

Because, on the third day of a tournament, Boston College hits a step-back 3 to beat us, does that mean we're not tournament worthy in November? When you're breaking it down, well, they've got this one that happened in November with a different team, basically, than what we are now, and so when you're on the bubble, like, you're good enough to be in the NCAA Tournament or not good enough because of a step-back 3 that Boston College hit to beat us.

Like one bad loss or the fine line that you're on, and one shot can say, oh, you're good enough to be in it or, oh, you're not good enough to be in it.

So that, I know they look at the whole body of work. But a lot of people talk about it and analyze it and overanalyze it. So, hopefully that kind of thing doesn't overdo it. I think it is the body of work, and we've got a great body of work. We're playing great ball now. We've got some quality wins. Played an aggressive schedule. Won games away from our home arena. The top of this league is as good as it has been. It's just all our numbers are down because the bottom of the league, their numbers are way down.

So if a bottom of our league was way better, and we beat them, like we did, does that mean -- you know, does that mean we get four or five teams in just because of that? It's complicated and so many moving parts to this thing.

But I know how good we're playing. I know what a good team we are. I'm proud of the work they've done and this was a pretty impressive tournament of what we just did.

Q. Just offensively, Leon, a tough three days shooting the ball. The ball just not go in the bucket? What do you think kind of led to those struggles? I know you also faced three very good defensive teams.

LEON RICE: No doubt, that's always a part of it. I think it's a huge part of it too.

I think when you look at a lot of our wings and guards, there's a lot of inexperience there. The older guys, they've been through this a little bit more. Like Tyson, shoot, he goes out and goes 3 for 5 from 3, has 22.7 rebounds. It's the experience. I look out there, and like uh-oh, I think we have three freshmen out there.

Experience matters a lot. Because I know they're good shooters. Julian is a great shooter. Peanut's a great shooter. M's made shots. They just don't have a lot of experience in these tournament situations.

The more experience you can have out there, guys that have made 3s in games, the better they get.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you for your time.

LEON RICE: Thanks so much, guys.

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