Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 12, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Utah State Aggies

Coach Jerrod Calhoun

Mason Falslev

MJ Collins Jr.

Drake Allen

Postgame Press Conference

Utah State 80, UNLV 60

THE MODERATOR: Ready to begin with Utah State.

We have student-athletes MJ Collins Jr., Drake Allen, Mason Falslev.

Your thoughts, Coach.

JERROD CALHOUN: I thought it was just a really good team effort by us on the defensive end. We turned them over 19 times. You know, we had a game plan. I thought Coach Haut and Coach Hill did a tremendous job over the last couple of days of putting the game plan together, so really proud of the guys.

You have to credit UNLV. They played all year without some main guys. They're big. They're physical. Obviously Lawhorn is a great player, but our guys are really locked in.

I thought the end of the first half was the changing point, and then obviously the second half we played really well.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for the student-athletes.

Q. UNLV was obviously the only team to beat you twice in the regular season. What kind of motivation does that give you going into today?

MJ COLLINS JR.: We knew that this was our last chance. There's a saying: It's hard to beat a team three times. We were just on edge all week. We knew what it meant for not only us, but the coaches too, and the community. As you see, our fans travel well. That was a great advantage for us.

We just took the last game. They'd said some things. We took it disrespectfully, and we used that as an edge today, and you seen by the outcome.

Q. During that challenge, Mason took you over and said some words of encouragement to you. After that challenge, you hit the three, and that's kind of when you guys all got going, made that run at the end of the first half. What did he say to you? How did that kind of get you guys going?

MJ COLLINS JR.: Mason, what did you say to me?

MASON FALSLEV: I don't know. I can't remember.

MJ COLLINS JR.: I really can't remember.

MASON FALSLEV: But it was what made him make the shot, whatever I said.

MJ COLLINS JR.: That just shows the kind of team that we have. Everybody is happy for each other. You know, we're a unit. I've told Coach plenty of times that this team has no egos. Like I said, we're just all happy for each other, and you can see that in our play.

Q. Mason, like MJ was saying, the crowd showed out. Unlike the past couple of tournaments, they were actually in the lower bowl for the whole game. Does that actually make a difference?

MASON FALSLEV: Oh, yeah. I mean, it's pretty cool. You walk into -- it should be a home field advantage right here in Las Vegas, and you look out there, and there's a lot of Aggie blue and the chants and the noise. Energy is contagious, so it definitely helps.

Q. Mason, 24 points, 9 rebounds from you. How much were you trying to be aggressive in this game to go up early against UNLV?

MASON FALSLEV: Game plan was to not settle, go at

them, and get into the paint and just make the right plays. I mean, it wasn't anything crazy. I just tried to make the right plays when I could.

Q. This is for any of the student-athletes. Four technicals and one flagrant called. What was it like on the court as far as how chippy it was between the two teams?

DRAKE ALLEN: Yeah, I'll take this one, I guess. No, you know, it's a physical game. It's an emotional game. I think we all knew it was going to be a tough game physically. Sometimes, you know, you get riled up.

But I'm proud of our guys the way we responded. I think you get a couple of technicals, but I think most of ours were for backing up our guys. We're not going to take any disrespect, and it showed.

Q. Mason and MJ, you two combined for 44 points. How did you kind of see your game open up based on the other one hitting shots? Just what did you see from UNLV's defense that allowed you to get a lot of open looks?

MJ COLLINS JR.: Just letting the game come to us. You know, it's hard to key in on, I feel like, the best duo in the Mountain West. So you know, when we're clicking on all cylinders, it opens up the game for the rest of our teammates. When we have it going or one has it going, you know, it takes pressure off of not only the other person, but the whole team. We just kind of piggyback off of each other, and it puts everybody else in place. It takes pressure off of everybody.

So, you know, we have to live up to taking the pressure. You know, Coach always tells us: Pressure is a privilege. So we kind of grab the bulls by the horn and we just got to go. The team is looking at me and him. We got to deliver every night.

Q. Drake, can you talk a little bit about the turnovers. Obviously you guys were able to turn them over and make points, but when you guys turned the ball over, you gave up three points for the whole game. What does that say about your team? How did you get back and really just stop them when you did turn the ball over?

DRAKE ALLEN: I think we had a couple of turnovers in the first half where I missed, dropped the ball at half court, missed the pass, went out of bounds, right? It wasn't like we were turning the ball like live turnovers, if that makes sense. They weren't forcing us into turnovers. I think we were just making mistakes.

It's a testament to our defense. That's something we've worked on. We have to get better in transition defense when we miss shots and when we turn the ball over. We have to get back, build walls, and I think we did a pretty good job of that tonight.

Q. I'll ask Drake this one as well. You forced a lot of turnovers. You had 12 steals. How important was playing the passing lanes in terms of kind of interior defense? Because a lot of those were swiping the ball away as they were trying to pass the ball across the key. How important was that to get steals to prevent them from getting into the paint?

DRAKE ALLEN: I think we were in, we call it our triangle. We were in our gaps pretty heavily today. Teams that like to drive the ball, we have to stay in front, we've got to show our hands.

Defense is about five guys. Not about one guy guarding the ball. It's not about two. It's about all five guys got to guard the ball. We have to load up. We've got to stay in front of the ball. But like I said, it's team defense. That's why our defense is good. All five of us are locked in and makes us a lot better when we guard that way.

Q. This is for Mason and MJ. As we mentioned before, you guys combined for 44 points, but a lot of that being done off the ball, you know, a lot of that scoring coming from off of screens and cuts. Just how have you guys learned to get going individually scoring the ball without always having the ball in your hands?

MASON FALSLEV: I think it all comes down to making reads. I'll give Coach a little credit for this, but we work a lot on offensive schemes. Depending on what the defense does, we do things to counter what they want us to do. So just making reads.

MJ COLLINS JR.: I'll say the same thing.

Q. I know all of you guys pointed to this a little bit earlier, but when you walked on to the court and you see all these fans cheering all you guys on and making it seem like this game is in Logan, what does that do for you guys motivationally, and did that translate onto the court?

DRAKE ALLEN: Yeah, feels like the Spectrum. It really does. You can get out there, you hear the boos, you hear the cheers, right? Then when they start doing the Scotsman, you know it's game time, right? We're very grateful. We're very blessed to have fans that travel. And I think that every game this week is going to be a home

game for us, so we should be ready to go.

Also, just gives you a sense of, you know, pressure. You know, we don't want to let those people down. They've been supporting us all year. It hasn't just been us. It's been them too. They've been along the journey with us; the losses, the wins. We have to bring another championship home for them.

THE MODERATOR: We'll let the student-athletes go.

Questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, this was mentioned already, but the turnover numbers were sort of similar, but the points off of turnovers were not so similar. It was 23-3 in your advantage. Can you talk about what it takes to make that difference happen in a game like this.

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, I mean, our whole goal was to play green tonight. What I mean by that is just flying around, taking gambles. We call it fit-fo [phonetic], kind of figuring it out, problem solving throughout a possession. I thought our guys' activity in the gaps on the ball. Any time you can turn a team over 19 times, your defense is clicking on all cylinders.

Probably where I'm most proud is the foul discipline, right? We talked about foul discipline. They only shot 15 free-throws. This is a team that likes to get the ball to the paint, likes to draw fouls. So I thought our ability to play with our chest today was really, really critical.

Q. What in your mind sort of sparked that run late in the first half?

JERROD CALHOUN: College basketball is a game of runs. When kids see the ball go through the basket, you know, their intensity defensively picks up. Whatever the score was, it was pretty close when we went on that run, and the guys' energy level just raised, right? There were some big-time plays there. We got a lot of run-outs in this game, which the first two times we played them, we didn't have those opportunities.

Like I said, basketball is a game of match-ups. It's really, really different than college football and these different sports. Some teams just give you different problems, and I'm really, really proud of our players and our staff. We were very possessed the last two to three days to get this win.

We had been hearing about it for a couple of days, but our preparation was really good.

Q. I want to ask about defending Gibbs-Lawhorn. You were the one team that's had more success where he had 10 in the last game, 9 points up until he hit a few buckets in garbage time. What have you been able to do to be the one team to slow him down?

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, we got great awareness on him. He's a great player. There's a reason he was a First-Team All-League player. Just another incredible story. Very similar to MJ. Everybody kind of crushes the transfer portal, but, you know, Josh did a tremendous job getting him out of the portal.

I mean, this place is a great home for him. You know, you hope a guy like that understands system and style of play has fit him really well here at UNLV. He should be very proud of the season he had, and he's one of the best guys I've seen score the basketball.

So you have to have awareness on scores. You have to be up to touch and pick and rolls. You can't let him get shots off. He got that one in transition or we would have held him to about 12 or 14 points. Tremendous awareness and really carrying out the game plan.

Q. I want to ask about MJ and Mason. You get 44 points from them, a bunch of rebounds, assists, and steals from them as well. What was it you saw from them as the stars on your team leading from the front?

JERROD CALHOUN: I thought they did a great job listening the last two days. Their ability to process information and buy in is really good. This time of year in these short turnarounds you have to be able to process things really fast. We're going to have probably an hour and a half with our team here. We'll split it up with film sessions, but you have to understand game plans. Every game changes. Whether that's a pick and roll or an off-ball screen, we're playing a big guy, we want to post trap.

You guys asked me the other day, hey, what adjustments are you going to have against the post? Well, you saw we trapped the post more than we ever had. I thought we did a great job of scrambling out of those traps.

That's a test to their buy-in. This time of year you got to have a great buy-in.

Q. The news came out about Eric Haut going to go to Tarleton State. What have you seen from him as an assistant coach, and what are your thoughts on him getting a head coaching job?

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, he's a guy that's worked -- what is he, 44? There are certain times in your life where

great things happen to you. You never know when they're going to happen.

I think Tarleton State hit a home run. I think there's a lot of mid-majors to low majors that love to hire logos. Utah State has a great logo. We have a great brand. There's not too many people in the country getting this many people for a conference tournament. That's any level of basketball.

So what I explained to them in the search for him as they started to gather information on Eric, we do more with less. We've said it publicly. We'll say it again. We are about fourth or fifth in this conference in rev share and NIL, right? Tarleton State is a school that they're going to understand Eric is a tremendous tactician. He's a tremendous coach, person, family guy. He's a winner.

So we're going to lose him, and that's tough, but at the end of the day, the greatest thing as a head coach is when you see your staff go on to become head coaches. I've had Joe Mazzulla, Ethan Faulkner, Shammgod Wells, Chinedu Nwachukwu with the Grizzlies. I've had a lot of guys. Eric is at the top of that list.

The players went nuts in there congratulating him because they know he's earned it.

Q. Talk a little bit about Garry Clark today. He's had some struggles.

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, Garry woke up in a bad mood. Garry was great. I hope he wakes up in another bad mood. I just have been telling him, man, listen, we're going to get you 15, 20 minutes. We need you to produce. We don't need you to go get 15, 20 points. We need you to battle on the glass, be good in your pick-and-roll coverages, understand game plans. He was tremendous tonight.

I liked it. He didn't back down. UNLV likes to trash talk. I think it's great. Sometimes it's good for the game. It's tournament time. You know, it's March. It's win or go home. Our guys understand that, and I think Garry understands that.

Q. You guys really kind of held your own on the rebounding battle, and that's something you struggled with against this UNLV team. What did you see on that side?

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, we imposed our will. We shot a great percentage, so there wasn't as many rebounds. We shot 50 from the field. Probably the biggest stat, guys, is points in the paint. We launched too many. You guys had said that. I think it was you, Mark, who made that point, what was it, last week. You said we're opening up every game with shooting threes, and I used your line, so we changed. So credit to you.

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