

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Utah State vs UCLA

Thursday, March 20, 2025

Lexington, Kentucky, USA

Rupp Arena

Utah State Aggies
Coach Jerrod Calhoun

Aubin Gateretse

Dexter Akanno

Mason Falslev

Ian Martinez

Media Conference

UCLA - 72, Utah State - 47

THE MODERATOR: We are joined by Utah State Head Coach Jerrod Calhoun, student-athletes Ian Martinez, Dexter Akanno, Falslev and Aubin Gateretse. Coach?

JERROD CALHOUN: I think a lot of the credit deserved tonight is with UCLA. We talked about it the last three days, they're an elite defensive team. But I thought in the first half they made shots. So much, this time of year, it's about shot making. When you don't make shots it affects your defense.

One thing about UCLA, if they don't make shots they're going to keep guarding. They're very, very tough. If their guards play like that they'll make a deep run. I just told that to Mick in the hallway.

Give them credit, but I also want to credit our guys. I thought putting a group of guys, 9 or 10 new players on a roster, winning 26 games, going to the NCAA Tournament, most seasons never end the way you want 'em to -- let's call it like it is.

Certainly we didn't want to get beat the way we did, but I want to credit our seniors. And certainly Mason I thought competed at a really, really high level. So I think Aggie nation obviously is hurting tonight. But this group really, really overcame a lot in a very short period of time. We're going to keep our heads up high.



Q. About 3-point shooting, it's been a strength for you guys this season but tonight didn't seem to be there. Was there something about the venue or the night that just didn't go right for you on 3s?

MASON FALSLEY: I think they did a good job of pressuring us. It's hard to make 3s when your rushed. They just didn't fall unfortunately tonight and we gotta live with that.

Q. Dexter and Ian, can you talk about this last year and Aubin, too, this being your final game, a tough way to go out. But like Coach said it's been a successful season in other ways.

IAN MARTINEZ: Like you mentioned, we didn't finish the way we wanted it, but there's a lot of great memories that have been built throughout this last year, like Coach said. It wasn't easy to just put a new group of guys together the way we did it.

Definitely going to miss Utah State, just the environment back at home, the people, my teammates is definitely for me, especially with my journey, some of the most unforgettable years. So I'm going to really miss it.

DEXTER AKANNO: I mean, first and foremost, I would like to thank God for giving me this opportunity to play for Utah State.

It's a blessing that the coaches brought me in, the players brought me in, even the whole Cache Valley brought me in with open arms and really embraced me. I mean, it's definitely a bittersweet moment, but something that I look back on and truly will be grateful for.

AUBIN GATERETSE: Absolutely, I'm -- obviously it hurts to go out this way, but I'm very grateful for all the experiences I've had this past four years, especially this year, at Utah State, everything that I fell in love with the first time I visited Logan, it was just -- everything was even better.

This year was amazing, like the fans, the brothers in the locker room. I'm very grateful for all these experiences and all the people that have been a part of my journey.



Q. Mason, talk about your game tonight. Seemed like you struggled like everybody else did shooting tonight, but you kept at it, getting rebounds, steals, just did everything like you've done down the stretch.

MASON FALSLEY: I just didn't want to lose. Was trying to crash every board doing everything I could to help us. Yeah, I got to get in better shape, be able to make shots when I'm tired. That's kind of how the game went.

Q. Ian and Dexter, about Mara and his impact, when he came into the game. Obviously he had some offense but he had, I think, he had three or four blocks in the first half. What impact did that have on your guys' offense where you had been doing well shooting inside the arc and then he kind of stifled that late in the first half?

IAN MARTINEZ: Obviously kinda hard to defend a 7-3 guy, especially when they got into a rhythm. Coming into the game, we didn't think they were a very good shooting team. That's definitely not one of their strengths but they shot it well tonight.

So for them to get a lot of points in the paint and also to shoot the wall well, it was kind of -- it was just tough to defend, especially with a 7-3 guy in the paint. And most of them was bigger than us. So definitely a heavy impact on the offense and defensively as well, a lot of length. Sometimes when you don't feel he's that close, he's probably still pretty close on blocking shots, even jumpers. So he had a big impact on both sides tonight.

Q. Mason, Coach always talks about how competitive you are. What has this season, particularly with the game in the NCAA Tournament, done for you and your fire to come back next year, a leader of the team, more hungry, stuff like that?

MASON FALSLEY: Yeah, you know, obviously I got a little taste last year with one win. And, you know, I was hoping we would get another one and even another one after that.

I'm definitely motivated and want to get back here next year and make a run. You know, that's the dream.

THE MODERATOR: Gentlemen, we appreciate your time. Thanks so much. Questions for Coach?

Q. Coach, could you talk about that last four and a half minutes of the first half and they had a 12-0 run that altered the game what went wrong?

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, it was 27-23 or 29-25, I can't

remember quite the exact score, but we felt really good at that point in the game. We couldn't make a shot, and it was within four. You know, so much sometimes when you are not making a shot it affects your defense. We let that happen tonight, and unfortunately, you know, we caught UCLA on a night that they made shots.

If their guards play really well like that, they can make a deep run, or they could lose in two nights. I just told Mick that. They're going to go as far as their guards. I thought during that stretch they were really, really good.

You look at Andrews, he was shooting 25% from three the last five games. He comes out tonight and makes some shots early. He's two for three in the first half, and he hadn't made those in the last five games. Sometimes it happens. I think the disappointing thing was, you know, we just could not manufacture points. We got a lot, a lot of open looks. It was crazy the amount of open shots we had and didn't make. So that part is disappointing. But coulda, shoulda, woulda, we got beat and got beat soundly.

Q. Coach, your thoughts on Mason and his performance. Nothing seemed to go right for you guys he's going to bring a lot to the table in every way that he could.

JERROD CALHOUN: Jason, I told Diana there were two kids that we couldn't control in the locker room, and it was him and Carson Templin, two sophomores. So I think that shows you their competitive spirit, their drive, what the uniform means to them at Utah State. The only one I could compare to, that I've coached -- you can only go on the guys you coached -- is Joe Mazzulla.

When we were at West Virginia, he would be not lose a sprint, he did not lose a rebounding drill, he did let us lose to the Final Four. So Falsley is first or second on my list that I have ever associated with, 13 years as a head coach, all my other time.

The kid just competes. My heart is hurting for him, because he went out the right way. He went out as a fierce competitor that -- you know, Aggie nation knows that. They've seen it for two years. The kid is just warrior.

Q. We talked about Mason, Ian, needing a third guy, and Dayton kind of did that in the second half?

JERROD CALHOUN: Dayton is going to be a good player for us. He gets downhill. He's just gotta continue to see the game better. Dayton is on his fourth school. He's a JUCO kid, two years at JUCO and one year at Queens. He's just scratching the surface. I think he can get better and better, the pick and roll reads. You saw the burst in



his game. Athletically he is as good as UCLA's guards.

The difference is, you saw the size. One thing we have learned, and we've talked to our collective people about this, we've talked as a staff continually about this is we've got to get bigger, and what I mean by that is on the frontline. We've got to spend more money in the NIL to get a forward, right, to get a center, to get athletic guys, because when you get in the NCAA Tournament, that's what you see.

We're not going to see 7-3, but I'm talking about 6-10, protecting the rim, shot blocking, finishing around the basket. We gotta get there, Sean. It's one thing we have to get. I think we will be able to do that. We had a record night last week in our NIL. The portal opens Monday. It's going to be very, very active. I told this group let's enjoy the a little time we have left.

There will be a lot of change. Let's not dwell on the 72-47. I thought we squeezed a lot out of a group, 26 wins. I thought it was really good. I feel bad as a coach the last three weeks I couldn't get them playing better, so I take a lot of blame and feel sick to my stomach about that, but sometimes it happens.

Q. Coach, this time of year Aggie fans get nervous about coaching situations, and you talked about the transfer portal. Your future, first year, but I know you talked about winning championships here at Utah State.

JERROD CALHOUN: I will talk about it. First of all, I have a ton of respect for our Athletic Director. Diana took a gamble on me. We didn't know each other. We had no relationship, no previous relationship, did not know each other at all.

The first time I flew out to Utah State was in April. I can remember getting off the plane and seeing those mountains, right, and it was just hard to describe, right, the scenery. Instantly we had a connection. There was a really good plan. I met with every single player. This year has been unbelievable. Right? I have learned to understand the West Coast. We started to recruit the West Coast.

We've got a top-five -- we've got five kids, I think, that are coming in that can really play. You see what type of talent we can have coming back. I was just offered a tremendous opportunity by Diana and the staff, you know, over the last really 24 hours.

So I think right now I want to just kind of continue to talk about the game. But, you know, I think at Utah State you

can win a national championship.

I wouldn't say that if I didn't believe it. One thing that has changed is the NIL. You're looking at Big Ten teams now spending upwards of \$9, \$10 million. You're looking at the SEC spending between of \$5, \$8 and \$10 million for rosters.

I think one thing we have done a tremendous job of -- and if Diana was not the athletic director and our staff and Nick and Eric (phonetic), and the support we have, we wouldn't make those jumps and those gains in NIL.

So there's a lot to really digest I think from the season. There is a ton to learn, not only the Mountain West, but what's the Pac-12 going to look like? What's Gonzaga going to look like? What are some of these teams when you get in a tournament setting -- I think at the mid-major level.

I don't consider us a mid-major. I consider us a mid-plus. In two years we're going to be as close to a power four as possible.

You have to have continuity. You're looking at the mid-major teams that are winning they have continuity. And I've said that all along. If you can get guys multiple years, you've got a chance to make a run. We threw this thing together in a very short period of time, in about a month. I think we have to reflect, figure out where we're going collectively and try to do it.

Q. Coach, the last few weeks some of the losses for you guys have been for multiple reasons, but a glaring one has been poor 3-point shooting. Today an example as well. Going forward you mentioned wanting to get a big man in the portal -- that should help on both sides of the ball. But how do you address 3-point shooting going forward? How do you mitigate the sort of struggles that you have had particularly late in the season.

JERROD CALHOUN: I think that's a great question. Anytime you don't have the ability to throw the ball inside and post up it makes the game very, very hard.

If you look at a team that won 26 games that only scores on 62% of their possessions inside the post, I often wonder sometimes how we did it. I thought we were pretty unique in some of the sets we ran, how fast we played, the pace we had to play. And when you have to constantly take wide pin-down threes and you're not getting anything easy, I think teams really, really figured out how to take Mason and Ian away.



And Mick Cronin did a masterful job of that tonight. Mason just willed himself to get 17 points. But I think to answer your question, how you become a better 3-point shooting team, you have to be able to pass and you have to be able to get easy threes.

And the best way to get easy 3s are from post-ups, and we didn't do that this year. We had a lob threat, and some guys that struggled at times, to be quite honest with you. So we've got to put all our focus on the front court and really, really try to address that.

THE MODERATOR: Coach, thanks so much.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports.

