

# NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: First Round - Long Beach State vs Arizona

Thursday, March 21, 2024

Salt Lake City, Utah, USA

Delta Center

**Long Beach State Beach**

**Coach Dan Monson**

**Jadon Jones**

**Aboubacar Traore**

**AJ George**

Media Conference

Arizona 85, Long Beach State 65

DAN MONSON: My stance this week doesn't change. I'm the luckiest guy in this tournament in the world to do what I got to do today with these guys.

We said before the game that we were just going to simplify it. There's three areas with a great team like this that you got to disrupt. They're leading the country in points in the paint. We did that 38-32. We had more points in the paint.

We said we got to out-rebound them. One of the top 10 rebounding teams in the country. We did that. I think it was 50 to 47.

We said we got to be tough enough to take good shots and take care of the ball because they turn those into transition points. That was one area where we got beat in.

A team that good, your margin for error is really small. I mean, as I told 'em, there's different elements in competition. You can lose, and that's unacceptable. There's no losers up here. We got beat tonight. They were better than us. They outplayed us, but they didn't out-tough us, they didn't out-compete us.

I'm really proud of these guys the way we fought today. We weren't good enough today. You have to be almost perfect in a game like this. The last five minutes of the first half, first five minutes of the second half, we just didn't play good enough.



It was emotional in the locker room, but I made 'em look me in the eye because there's no heads down because I can't be more proud. This group needs their heads up high. I want to thank them for the ride.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for our student-athletes.

**Q. As you guys look back on this incredible two-week run, this season as a whole, what are you all going to take away from this ride and this season?**

JADON JONES: Obviously we're a little hurt right now. We didn't go as far as we wanted to. But we know in a few days, looking past it, looking back on it, we're going to be really proud of this group.

We had a lot of adversity. We had a lot of ups and downs, ebbs and flows. But we're a family. We stayed a family through everything.

If you saw the locker room, you would see a family. We love each other. We love this game. We love Coach. We love the media team. We love the janitors, we love the staff. We love the families. Mama Darci, Maddox MicGuire, Mollie, McKenna. We love Sheena. We love everyone. All the wives, everyone who has been on this ride with us, they have been absolutely complementary to what we've been able to achieve.

There's only one winner at the end of this. There's only going to be one team. Tonight we weren't good enough. Arizona played a hell of a game. They deserved to be in the spot they're in.

We're going to look back on this fondly. Of course, we wish we would have gone farther. This is a memory I'll never forget. I know I love these guys to death, man, so... I'm okay.

ABOUBACAR TRAORE: You see who loves you, how tight you are as a family when adversity came. I think we show that to the whole country two weeks ago, a week ago, when our coach got fired. We stay a family. We fought. Now we here today.



Obviously we disappointed because we wanted to go further than this. But I'm happy because I know I'm living like a good family. We fought today. I'm really proud of the guys.

AJ GEORGE: I'm super proud of this whole team, whole family, fans, just whole Long Beach Nation. The past few weeks we faced a lot of adversity, things happening with coach, us losing five games prior to this. A lot of people didn't think we'd even make it to this moment. They didn't think we'd make it past the first game in the conference tournament.

I'm just proud of all of our guys for just fighting and all the staff and fans just for believing in us as a team. That's it.

**Q. AJ, you've been in and out of the starting lineup, did everything for this team. You come into the first half off the bench and gave the team a spark. Can you talk about your mental approach coming into that game and changing the momentum?**

AJ GEORGE: Really my mental going into the game is never about my own stuff. It's always for the team. But credit to my teammates today, they found me open. They got me open shots.

Going into every game, I don't think about scoring or I have to get this amount of points. I do of what my team needs me, guarding a five man, playing a four. Whatever Coach Monson and the team needs from me, that's what I do. That's my mindset going into every game.

**Q. What was it like kind of saying good-bye to coach in the locker room after your final game together?**

JADON JONES: There is no good-bye. He's created a family. He brought us all here. We're all here 'cause of him. We all might not be playing for him again, but we're going to keep in touch, we're going to see him, we're going to try to be involved as much as possible.

Obviously it hurts, this being our last game with him. But it's not truly a good-bye. Like I said, we're a family. That's never going to go away because love is unconditional. Doesn't matter how far he goes, I go, the other 13 guys in the locker room go, it's not good-bye, it's just more of a I'll see you when I see you, to be continued, as he said in the locker room.

I will say it is a thank you, though. Truly a thank you. Truly, thank you, Coach, for everything, man. You've taught us a lot. You've done a lot for us, more than you realize. It's not to be continued or good-bye, it's thank you.

That's the biggest thing.

THE MODERATOR: We'll excuse the student-athletes and continue with questions for Coach Monson.

**Q. You've been at the Beach a long time, won a lot of games. Now it's basically over. What are your emotions in this moment?**

DAN MONSON: I'm proud, happy, reflective. A range of emotions. Mostly proud. Proud of my tenure. I'm proud of doing it the right way. Proud of the student-athletes that came out of here, that came in as young men, left as men. Came in without a college degree and left with a college degree. Came in here with skill development, leaving here with skills enough to go play professionally.

I think proud is the most. Proud of just who I am. Proud of my family, too, by the way. Shout-out over there. It's a tough couple weeks. I couldn't imagine it without them.

**Q. You talk about the graduation rate and all that stuff. There's more kids out there who need your help. Are you done coaching?**

DAN MONSON: I hope not. But that's not all entirely to me. We'll see what happens.

I think, again, a lot of reflection to this week. I think you have to have that drive in your belly. When somebody tells you you can't do something, you feel that drive in your belly, you're like, Okay...

As competitors, former athletes, you're always looking to do it on the golf course or playing cards or something. I got to do it with 18-year-olds at my age. I'm looking forward to being on the couch tomorrow and maybe watching games Saturday and Sunday. But Monday I'm going to miss this team. I'm going to miss going in with my staff and figuring out how to compete with somebody else. It will hit me I think on Monday.

I hope I have a challenge. But I'm okay if I don't. It's not going to define me as a person. That's one thing these two weeks have taught me. My family and my friends, my players, are going to define my happiness.

**Q. As a guy who grew up in Hawaii, followed the Big West conference for the last decade, I can't help but think about the motto that the Big West is constantly hammering into everyone, It's only the bold. How have you as a coach seen that in your players, that boldness, the last two weeks or so?**

DAN MONSON: Well, I think everybody's seen it. What

have I seen? What have you seen? That's not for me. That's for even to answer. I think they represented themselves pretty bold. I think they represented themselves and their family the right way. This university gave us all an opportunity. I don't think we let 'em down. I think these guys played for the right way, for the right reasons.

**Q. You were talking about Monday is going to be a little rough. You've been going at this for years. Is there anything that you have wanted to do outside of basketball that maybe you'll have a couple days or weeks to do?**

DAN MONSON: Again, I've got experience at everything at my age. I've also got experience at being fired. I got fired November 28th in my eighth year at the University of Minnesota. I remember taking the kids at 40 below, whatever it was, to the bus stop with all the other moms. Just trying to hang on to my marriage. I had to go home. It was just her and I all day long.

Get coaching basketball was a whole lot easier than raising those kids. Her and I did go to -- I always mess it up. Where'd we go for -- we went to Cancun for a couple days. That was great for us. For me personally, there was nothing I would rather do than what I did today. I've been joking about it, I'm doing it for free. I think that's really a great way to go out because all these coaches, as I've said all week, would do it for free.

But to be able to get to do it for free I think is a statement to my career as far as, you know, we're well-compensated. I think at Minnesota there was a couple days where I didn't want to get out of bed. But these jobs are so much fun. That's something that I realized through this, these last couple weeks, is how lucky I am to be able to represent our university that I believe in, players that I believe in, family and friends.

My motto for 30 years as a head coach, 25, whatever it is, every year I've given the players the first day a practice a bracelet, it says 'MINDSET' on it. That's what our program is based on, having the mindset. M is for meaningful. I is for indivisible. N is for no excuses. D is for discipline. E is for excellence. T is for toughness and thankfulness.

Today was a T game. It was about toughness and thankfulness. I'm just thankful for the ride I've gotten, as I've said. It's been a heck of a ride. I knew the car was leased. I knew this week it didn't even have insurance to it. But I got to drive a heck of a car. I've got to give it back now.

I'm hoping I can drive again. If I can't, I'll walk 'cause I've

got places I can go. I can walk to the sunset or I can walk the dog or I can walk with my kids. I said that last week. I'm not Jim Harbaugh. I'm better than that. I've got it even better.

**Q. What has it been like for you getting all the support that you've gotten from your coaching peers?**

DAN MONSON: Well, that's what friends do. I mean, all of us in life, when your friends have adversity or something, you come to their side. They don't even know the whole story sometimes. It doesn't matter 'cause we love each other.

As I told Tommy at the end there, if it's got to be my last game, at least it's with family. If we're the one that jump-starts them to go win a national championship, I can always let him know that I helped 'cause family helps each other.

But they helped me through a tough time this week. Not just the media, but behind the scenes. Nobody's helped me more than my family. Those guys are family. Coaching is a very tight-knit community. Not just Mark Few and Tommy Lloyd, but I've got 50 or 60 Division I head coach texts in the last two weeks. It means a lot.

Just like everybody else, when you're going through stuff, it's the people that you can lean on that get you through it. It's been easy these two weeks because I've had so many people to get me through it.

It starts with having somebody like a wife that understands the profession, that understands what you're going through. I appreciate what she's been there by my side.

I had press credentials for my two girls and my wife last Thursday, last Friday, last Saturday, and then today because, as the kids can tell you, this is a tight-knit family. I wanted my family to represent theirs and everybody else.

I didn't have to use it Thursday. They didn't have to use them Friday. They did come in Saturday. It was great to be with my family today as this journey, as I said, to be continued, but ended temporarily today.

**Q. You talked about wanting to appreciate this after your run with Gonzaga in '99. Did you feel that out there, that you were soaking this in?**

DAN MONSON: Yeah, yeah. Because I always say that one of my biggest regrets of my career is 1999, Gonzaga Elite Eight run. How can you regret that? The reason why I regret it is because it happened my second year as a head coach. I was naïve thinking that this is normal, that

this was going to happen again and again.

I was disappointed we didn't win a national championship. 25 years later, I got a different perspective, okay? I got a different understanding of how difficult that is and what an honor and was a privilege it is to get to this tournament, how much it takes from coaching to luck to injury-free situations.

I absolutely soaked up every minute today. I'm going to remember it for a lifetime. I just hope it's a long time that I got left to remember it (smiling).

**Q. There was intense reaction today to some comments from your athletic director, kind of crediting the run in the NCAA tournament to the firing. Just need to ask you if you have any response to that?**

DAN MONSON: No. If it helped, I'm really happy we did it because I wouldn't trade it for the job or any other job. I've said that all along. If that's what spurred it, that's great. But we'll never know 'cause that's how it played out. We'll never know if it did or not.

It's not really worth talking about, but...

**Q. You've let us see into your history, your emotion, how much this job has meant to you. From the seat of being a head coach, how would you describe the opportunity to help raise young men, the impact this coaching profession has had on your life?**

DAN MONSON: Oh, that's a great question. It's enormous. I mean, it's an enormous responsibility, but with responsibility comes gratitude and satisfaction. I was born into this. My father was a great coach. He was National Coach of the Year in 1980, '79, right in there. He never wanted me to go into coaching because there's so many ups and downs.

When I finally told him I was doing it for me, then he got a little bit excited. With my boys, if they want to do it, I'm like, What a great life I've had. Like I said, I don't wake up in the morning with an alarm. I wake up excited to go see the guys.

As you said, developing student-athletes is a tremendous responsibility. I promise parents with recruiting, If you trust me with your son, I'll treat them like my own kids.

I think I've lived true to that mantra. I hold them accountable. This group, really not said enough, they had a 3.2 GPA last semester. There's no NIL money at Long Beach State right now. These guys are student-athletes that do it the right way on and off the court. I'm proud to be

the one that helped them guide it that way.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.

DAN MONSON: Not in quite a joking mood. Yesterday was more fun (smiling).

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