

NCAA Men's Basketball Championship: Regional Semifinal - San Diego State vs UConn

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Boston, Massachusetts, USA

TD Garden

San Diego State Aztecs

Brian Dutcher

Lamont Butler

Jaedon LeDee

Darrion Trammel

Sweet 16 Pregame Media Conference

THE MODERATOR: Welcome, Coach. Please give an opening remark.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, I was going to ask us about getting back at 4:00 in the morning and traveling five hours to get here, and I would just say this. It's a blessing. We're grateful for everything that's come our way. We've worked hard to earn it, and year we're thankful to be here and excited for an opportunity to play a really good UConn team.

THE MODERATOR: Questions, please.

Q. Dutch, last year you guys were in this exact same spot in this round. You played the No. 1 overall seed in Alabama. What potentially did you learn from the mindset and preparation you needed? I know it's different opponents, but just being in that spot and what take-away from that Alabama game might you be able to utilize here?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, first of all, I wish we were playing in Louisville. That would be a little further for UConn, but no, we're playing here, and we're excited for it.

It's two different opponents. Alabama was a lot younger. UConn is way more experienced, having won a national championship, had these kind of moments already. So in that regards it's different.



The talent level is really close to the same. Both programs put guys in the NBA off their teams. So it's a different kind of a feel, but again, we're grateful to have a chance to try to play against a really good top seed for this tournament.

Q. For those much us who haven't really seen Jaedon play much this season, just can you talk about how he has just blossomed from a guy averaging seven points off the bench to 21 1/2 this year and an All-American candidate. His gradual improvement over the season and how different a player he is now.

BRIAN DUTCHER: This is to Jaedon's credit more than anything. He was capable of doing a lot of this last year, but I had Matt Bradley on the team, and he dominated the ball a lot, and for good reason. He was a really good player, and I didn't need Jaedon dominating the ball too.

He waited his turn. He was patient. He kept putting his work in. It's not as big a surprise to the coaching staff as it is to maybe the country as a whole that Jaedon is this good. We knew he was this good. He was just waiting for his opportunity, and that's a credit to him to be willing to do that.

Q. When you think about, to that point on Jaedon, what he is being asked to do, how that's different, along the lines with this team, you come off an amazing run of last season. There's obviously an increased attention, pressure, spotlight, whatever you want to call it. What's it say about this group that in the challenge of their league that in the ups and downs of a season that you are in back-to-back Sweet 16s?

BRIAN DUTCHER: It's a credit to the kind of kids we recruit. They're hard workers. They can deal with adversity. I mean, we got beat a lot this year in hard road environments. Took everybody's best shot, and not unlike Connecticut. They took everyone's best shot, but they won a lot of those games. That's why they're the top seed.

We won enough of them to earn a 5 seed, but it's been a challenging year because everybody knows that we played for the championship last year. Everyone knows what we've done in the Mountain West.



So I think all those moments of preparing us for this moment hopefully. That we played hard environments. We played hard games, and we somehow have been able to stand on two feet and continue to win. That's our goal for tomorrow is to find a way to stand on two feet and win.

Q. How much can it help in your preparation that you did just play UConn fairly recently in April, and I know the personnel is a little different, but can that help you?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, hopefully there will be some familiarity with them from last year. A lot of the same players back. A lot of the same system. They play a lot the same way.

Danny has done an incredible job, so we kind of know what it looks like. We know how hard it is. As much as they ran through the tournament last year, dominated pretty much everybody, we felt with five minutes to go it was a five-point game, we put ourselves in a chance to win.

So hopefully tomorrow we'll do the same thing. Hopefully with five minutes to go in the game we'll have an opportunity to win.

Q. How important is a guy potentially like Darrion for you? He was huge last year when you played Alabama. He hit the big free throw against Creighton. It seems like when he plays a complete game, shoots it well from three, you guys are more difficult to guard and potentially that works to your advantage when he plays like that.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, I've got the starting back court from last year's national championship runner-up. I have Lamont and Darrion back, and that's a good place to start. You know, two guys that have been in big games that have had important moments in the NCAA Tournament. Obviously Darrion, MVP of the south regional. Lamont Butler's shot against Florida Atlantic, they've been in these moments.

They're not going to be afraid of the spotlight. They're not going to be afraid of their moment. Hopefully they have that kind of one shining moment that will allow us to get a victory tomorrow.

Q. In terms of NIL you were at Michigan when there was a famous anecdote about Chris Webber and how he couldn't afford his jersey at the campus bookstore there. So it's going back 30 years or so, but how much empathy did you feel for him then, and how much does that story buttress the argument that teams like San

Diego State should play in the Vegas NIL tournament next year?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, I mean, obviously I think one of the reasons I'm sitting here is I've adapted to every rule change there's been for a lot of years in college basketball because I don't make any of them, but I've found a way to adapt. We've found a way to adapt.

Obviously back in Michigan the Fab Five generated a lot of income, and they couldn't benefit on any of it. Selling of their jerseys, their likeness. They were truly the first team that probably had the ability to make money on what they did for college basketball. Unfortunately, they couldn't do that.

To see where it's at now it's a good thing, but to a degree you know it's not NIL. It's what the NCAA always kind of stood against, boosters playing players. We can walk around NIL, but the game has changed. So you have to adapt to it. You have to try your best to give your guys opportunity to make money playing basketball, but try to do it the right way, where you're not spoiling them, where there's still a hunger to try to achieve something other than that. The greatest goal we have in college is to graduate our players.

There's nothing wrong with making money playing basketball from NIL standpoint, but to transfer every year, every year, they're not going to graduate in four years. You go to four colleges in four years, you're not going to graduate. Not all your credits are going to transfer.

Our mission has to be to graduate student-athletes. They're not all going to make a living playing pro basketball. Maybe as a young person you can't appreciate that as much, but our goal has to be to graduate players, and if they can make money and we can help them do that without just getting caught up in your next stop in college basketball, I think that would be a good thing for all of us.

Q. You're laser-focused on UConn now, but how much interest do you have in playing in that tournament next fall?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I think we have to. To stay relevant we have to raise NIL money in order to stay competitive.

Like I said, there are rules that we all deal with. Some college coaches like and don't like, but it's the rules we're dealing with. So for us to have an opportunity to generate NIL money for our players is a good thing for us.

Q. Along those lines let's talk about some of the changes in college basketball over time and some of

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your fellow coaches have gotten out of the business in recent years for various reasons, but for you, a guy who has been there for a long time and been a part of a national championship team already, what keeps you coming back and wanting to be a part of this world and being a part of college basketball as much as you already accomplished in your career as a coach?

BRIAN DUTCHER: At this point in my life at 64 years old I'm just trying to help young people. I'm not out chasing jobs. I'm not out there trying to self-promote. I'm just trying to help everybody around me... my assistant coaches, the players that I coach, trying to make a difference at our university, trying to do the right things and make a difference in people's lives, and that's all I'm really trying to do.

Q. I know you don't get to make the rules, but if you could tinker with the transfer portal situation, what do you think is a better-case scenario or best-case, or is there one?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I don't think it's good for any of us to have free agency every single year because then we're going to lose sight of graduating players, and their credit -- like I said, their credits aren't going to transfer, not all of them. You could go from one school to another, I don't care if you are going Ivy League to a non-Ivy League school, not all of your credits are going to transfer.

We used to have a sit-out year, and you could catch up academically and graduate from that school. The one-time transfer I'm good with, but once we got rid of you had to sit if you transferred twice, I think that's not a good thing because the mission has to be to graduate from college.

They're all sitting in that locker room and think they're going to play a long time professionally once they're done in college, whether it's overseas or in the NBA, but the reality is they're going to live most of their lives without a basketball in their hands.

So we have a mission to make sure they're prepared for that part of their lives, which young people don't see sometimes, you know? They know it's going to happen, but they don't really know. So to have all this free agency in basketball, we lose sight of the most important mission we have, which is to graduate student-athletes.

Q. I wanted to stay on the transfer portal. I'm curious for you operationally as a staff, this is now a second year where you are advancing in the tournament and dealing with potential opportunities in the transfer portal. How have you evolved as a staff to handle that situation?

BRIAN DUTCHER: I'm talking to players in the portal right now, and I haven't done a Zoom yet, but we're trying to set one up. That's the unfortunate thing with the timing of it. Teams that are still playing are -- you have to multi-task.

I'm 100 percent focused on this year, but I'm doing San Diego State a disservice if I don't have an eye on the future too, so I have to multi-task. I have to be able to do a lot of things.

That's part of the job. Everybody is dancing in the portal jumping in there. There's still 16 teams playing that guys from those teams are going to be in the portal too. So the process is just starting.

It's going to run all summer, and there are going to be guys jumping in the portal as soon as this round ends from eight schools that don't win and then four more will jump in, and the portal is just something we're dealing with.

Like I said, if it was only a one-time transfer, we would cut those numbers in half, and it would be more manageable, but this is true free agency that not even pro teams would ever in their wildest dreams deal with, free agents every year, and we're dealing with it in college.

Q. Charlie Baker, the NCAA president, said this morning that the organization is going to start to work on banning prop bets on individual players. I'm wonder if anything you had an opinion on that? Part of it is players getting harassed for not hitting overs and unders and whatever it is. I'm wondering, you obviously play in hostile environments where fans are close. Did you see any of that this season?

BRIAN DUTCHER: What these kids deal with with social media in every regard, just their own mental well-being. People complaining about how they're playing, missing shots, and they just get beat up constantly. We all see what social media does to the youth of this country. Just because they're kids with big bodies doesn't mean they're not affected by social media, by pressures outside of the small world they live in.

Yeah, we're all dealing with problems that occur with social media, and whether that's prop bets that people are texting them and posting stuff, yeah, it's unfortunate.

Q. To pigeon-hole off the question, how concerned should coaches like you be at the Temple report that came out related to suspicious betting trends? And should there be preventive measures in terms of seminars to educate players on some of the perilous characters that are out there from point shaving,

syndicates, and places like that?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Well, this is the one thing that's not a new problem. Betting on sports has happened for a long, long time. So I think we've done a good job staying ahead of it. We mentor our kids. We have gambling talks about the dangers of it, about people reaching out for information from them.

This is the one thing I think we're probably all ahead of the curve on. Obviously we're seeing that they're able to track these things through cell phone records, and I think we're ahead of the curve as far as monitoring betting in athletics.

Q. Two questions for you. First, I'm wondering if you could provide some clarity on Coach Chris, if he's left for Long Beach, what his status is with the team? The second question is, after what you've been through in 2011, 2023, have you been relishing this opportunity now to get this shot at UConn and to climb that mountain? Where has that been in your mind?

BRIAN DUTCHER: First of all, with Coach Acker obviously we're excited he is a candidate for Long Beach State, amongst other jobs. I take great pride in that, that you don't have to go from a Power 5 school to get a head job. That you can get one from San Diego State.

We may not be in a Power 5 conference, as to speak, but I feel like we're a Power 5 school. I like the opportunity that our coaches are getting, and hopefully will continue to get to become head coaches from San Diego State. I take great pride in that.

As far as UConn, it's like a repeat. I mean, we got to do what they did to us. We had them in Anaheim with Kemba Walker and a chance to beat them close to our home. We played them in L.A. obviously in Anaheim, and they beat us. They beat the Kawhi Leonard team. So we're in their backyard now, and hopefully we'll have an opportunity to beat them close to their home.

THE MODERATOR: Thank you, Coach.

Welcome, gentlemen. Questions, please.

Q. I guess for each of you, what's it like to have a second opportunity here against Connecticut?

LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, I mean, definitely a blessing to be here in the Sweet 16 again. To be able to play UConn again is great too. They took us down last year, so we definitely want some revenge back a little bit.

It's an honor to be here. We can't wait to play.

JAEDON LeDEE: Yeah, just going off what Lamont said, it could have been anybody. It could have been UConn. It could have been Kentucky. It could have been Boys or Girl Scouts. It doesn't matter.

Being here in this position, it's a blessing for us to be together and have fun and enjoy this game together. It's a blessing.

DARRION TRAMMEL: Yeah, it's a blessing just to be here back to back. Not a lot of teams can do that, and not a lot of teams make this tournament. So it's just an opportunity to show who we are as a team. I think we're just super excited for that.

Q. Jaedon, does it feel different for you this year? Just last year you were essentially coming off the bench. You didn't play as big of a key role. Now leading scorer, one of the top players in the country. Does it feel different going against UConn this time?

JAEDON LeDEE: I mean, not that much. Like I said, we all have a role, and I feel like last year the team was so good. The team this year is really good. So we all have a job to do, and I'll just go out there and do my job. That's it.

Q. For any of you. College basketball has enjoyed its best ratings ever again during this tournament. At the same time we all know there's a million different issues going on from a suit at Dartmouth to NIL to transfer portals. Do you sense being in the middle of a game that's changing, or do you just focus on yourselves? Are there any things you would like to tell people about kind of the state of college basketball?

LAMONT BUTLER: First off all, I like the way you said "tournament." It was like "TOUR-nament." That was funny.

We kind of just focused on going in every day and being the best version of ourselves. NIL has kind of changed basketball in a way. It's different. We're able to make money off our name, image, and likeness. That's a blessing in itself. People use it in different ways. I feel like I use it in the right way.

I'm just trying to go out there and play my best basketball and set myself up for the future.

THE MODERATOR: Do you have anything to add?

DARRION TRAMMEL: No, Mont got it.

Q. Jaedon, how different can this team be on any

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given night when the guys on either side of you are playing well? They were big -- obviously Darrion last year against the No. 1 overall seed Alabama, and Lamont has the big shot in the Florida Atlantic game. They could potentially change the dimension of trying to guard and compete with you guys.

JAEDON LeDEE: Yeah. If these two guys next to me are going, we're really hard to beat. At San Diego State, we can lock up, we can play hard. If these two guys next to me are hitting shots, there's not really much the other team can do. Yeah, that makes us really tough to beat.

Q. Lamont, how is your team different from the team that played UConn last year? I imagine more experienced, more mature, but how is it different? And to the degree that you have seen UConn, how do you think they're different from what you saw last year?

LAMONT BUTLER: Yeah, I think we're very versatile offensively. We got a bunch of scorers that can put the ball in the basket at any time. Jaedon has been playing unbelievable, but Darrion, Micah, myself, Reese, we have guys that can really score. Jay Pal, Elijah, they've been playing well.

I think defensively we're kind of still dominant there. We lost Nate and AG, Keshad, and guys like that that really put their best effort forth, but I think in our own way we have our own defensive identity.

Then UConn, they're still really good. They lost some NBA guys, but they only lost three games this year, and they're playing very well at a high level. We can't wait. It's going to be a great game. Hopefully we come out on top.

Q. Coach had talked about travel and you guys are getting in at 4:00 in the morning, and obviously it's a grind to travel cross-country for a game. You guys are playing in one of the most iconic sports venues in the country, one of the most iconic sports cities arguably in the world. Do you feel that kind of buzz, or did you feel any of that when you arrived here? Anybody that wants to take this question.

JAEDON LeDEE: No, like I said, it's a blessing to be here. Flying across country doesn't matter. Like Coach said earlier, we flew five hours or ten hours to come play. It's just great to be here. I think most guys have never been to the East Coast, so just seeing the culture and how it's different than the West is real cool. We are just really happy to be here.

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