

# Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday, March 13, 2025

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

**New Mexico Lobos**

**Coach Richard Pitino**

**Nelly Junior Joseph**

**Donovan Dent**

Postgame Press Conference

New Mexico - 63, San Jose State - 52

RICHARD PITINO: Certainly happy we got the win. I think it was a frustrating game for us, but I thought our defense in the second half was phenomenal. Donovan made some huge plays offensively. Nelly tied a record for us in conference tournament rebounding the ball.

So it was just kind of a choppy, ugly game. And a lot of that has to do with San Jose. But we just needed to figure out a way to get it and advance. And get a little rest tonight and get excited for tomorrow.

Grateful for all of our amazing fans, and certainly proud of the win.

**Q. Donovan, you've become the first player in conference history with 20 points and five assists in five straight games. What's the significance of that to you what was working to are you tonight?**

DONOVAN DENT: It's a credit to my team. The five assists I can't do without them. Being able to succeed in the ball screen was big to my 20 points.

**Q. Nelly, you got 18 boards, eight of them offensive. What did you feel you did well on the offensive glass tonight?**

NELLY JUNIOR JOSEPH: I was just more aggressive trying to rebound the ball. That's all it is.

**Q. In January, in San Jose, they were able to make it a game where it was just you two and nobody else was able to get going offensively. It was that way most of the game today. Tru ended up with 11 points. What**



are they doing -- it's not like they're letting you guys go -- but what are they doing to shut everyone down so consistently when they play you?

DONOVAN DENT: I don't think they did much. I think it's really on us. We've just got to figure it out on the offensive side and go from there.

**Q. Tru obviously was pretty active defensively throughout the game, not just the offense in the second half. What does it do for your team when Tru is so active and gets his hands on so many loose balls and he's diving around getting steals?**

DONOVAN DENT: Just gives us energy. First play of the game he got a steal. Should have been an and-one. Just gives us energy and we just get life on defense because of that.

**Q. You guys were 14-of-28 of layups and that's because you hit some late layups to kind of catch up to 50 percent. What was going on at the rim that was so difficult for you guys tonight to finish?**

NELLY JUNIOR JOSEPH: I mean, it's basketball. You miss some, you make some.

**Q. Donovan, playing on Tru's defense sets up that shot right before halftime. Walk through, he makes a great play, you hit a big shot; I've got to believe the momentum going in really was big. And did that make any difference for you guys in the second half?**

DONOVAN DENT: Yeah, hitting a half-court shot anytime gives a team a lot of energy. That is a lot of credit to Tru. He got a steal one second left on the clock and able to create that possession. That was big time on his side.

**Q. [Inaudible]?**

DONOVAN DENT: The play? It was really just throw the ball and hope it goes in.

**Q. [Inaudible]?**



DONOVAN DENT: That's how it works.

**Q. Donnie, you guys went on a huge run to close out the first half. What changed for you guys to be able to just get stops and just build on the lead?**

DONOVAN DENT: I think the last four-minute we got on each other in that timeout. On the defensive side we said we've got to play harder. And that's what we did, we came out and played with that high energy we've been playing with all season.

**Q. What's it mean to start the tournament right? First game of the day. Now you can just sit back and kind of watch everybody else.**

DONOVAN DENT: We're going to watch, I think, Boise-San Diego State. We play the winner of that. We're just build momentum off this game. It's a good momentum builder for us (indiscernible) first game.

**Q. How important is the crowd? This is my first chance ever seeing Lobo Nation. It's pretty electric. How much does it help you guys?**

DONOVAN DENT: It's a big help. It gives us all the energy we need. I don't think -- I couldn't even tell there was a single San Jose State out there because of how much red I saw. Our fans take over arenas and it's a big time help for us.

**Q. Coach, 10 straight halves you've outscored opponents in these tournaments. Can you talk about the consistency that requires?**

RICHARD PITINO: It's so different year to year with all these teams. Obviously we were much different last year. But I loved just the mental toughness to find a way to get that win when we weren't making shots, missing free throws.

That was a grind-it-out, find-a-way-to-get-it-done win. Can't speak on the other ones, but we certainly have times where we really break the game open. Tru got the steal, the dunk. And then you get the crowd going. Pretty special.

**Q. I did watch the game, but I'm going to ask you anyway. What was going on that they're able to make things difficult for you guys at the rim so much?**

RICHARD PITINO: They were physical. We definitely were missing a lot early. We were leaving a lot of points at the rim. Nelly was. I know he's frustrated because he

missed some shots. But there were some of them where he was worried about the refs. Just go dunk the ball. Mustapha missed a couple at the rim as well.

I thought that snowballed our attitude. We were really frustrated that we weren't making easy baskets. Well, it is March. It's win or go home. Our guys need to understand that. Some of it was them, San Jose, and some of it certainly was us.

**Q. You guys are, most of the season, you've been at your best when you got out and run and use the defense into offense. And you end up with 24 points off turnovers today. What, 18 turnovers for them. You guys were able to do that a little better than you were in the regular season against them. Happy when you see Tru start a game with a steal like that and a break-away?**

RICHARD PITINO: I think they had 10 turnovers at halftime and we only had one fast-break point where we've got to get, whether it's off steals, those points off turnovers or if they miss -- because they only shot 36 percent in the first half -- we need more fast break points.

So certainly more points off of turnovers than fast break points, that was better.

But Tru did a lot of good things. It's great to have that guy, put him on the ball, really, really disrupt and create some havoc.

**Q. Mustapha, obviously, the foot issue has been a big story line for the last six weeks really. Is he 100 percent healthy? 0-for-6 for 3. Any worries about Mustapha going forward with the minutes?**

RICHARD PITINO: No, he seems like he's fine. He just wasn't making shots today. He was getting good looks. I'm sure he's a little hobbled like everybody is this time of year. He'll knock them down. Went 0-for-6 for 3, and I think they were all really good looks.

**Q. There's going to be a lot of people that never see you guys play in the next couple of weeks. What would you say your identity is?**

RICHARD PITINO: Well, certainly our defense has been terrific all year, creating steals and getting points off turnovers, like you saw 24 today. I think we've got pretty good size across the board.

Offensively when Nelly and Donnie are in ball screens, they're pretty darned good. Those other guys have obviously got to knock down shots.

We've been doing it a lot with our defense versus a San Jose team, you saw them in the first half, their offense was terrific. Defense to offense, pretty good in the ball screens and Donovan obviously is terrific.

**Q. I don't want to take away from this win, but if one of your players said to your dad, you make some, you miss some them, how would you take that?**

RICHARD PITINO: My dad? I don't know. I'm not sure. I don't think they had a really astute answer for you guys with that.

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