

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 14, 2026

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

Utah State Aggies

Coach Jerrod Calhoun

Drake Allen

MJ Collins Jr.

Mason Falslev

Postgame Press Conference



Utah State 73, San Diego State 62

JERROD CALHOUN: First of all, that's an NCAA Tournament team. They belong in the NCAA Tournament. If you look at their body of work, I hope they get in.

I think Coach Dutcher is a tremendous coach. This league deserves a couple bids. There's no doubt about it.

Extremely, extremely proud of the toughness level that this group of guys came to Vegas with. We were not going to be bullied. We were going to be the bully.

I kind of deem this our redemption tour. UNLV beat us twice, Nevada beat us at Nevada, and obviously got embarrassed a couple weeks ago by the Aztecs. We were coming in here to be the bully, we were coming in here for a redemption tour, and it certainly was accomplished.

Q. Drake, Mason, can you talk about the performance this tournament of your MVP, especially today, 20 points. You guys are undefeated when he scores 20, especially that run down the stretch that eventually put it out of their hands.

DRAKE ALLEN: I'll talk about him for a bit, I guess. He's MVP for a reason. That's what he does. Whenever we need a big shot down the stretch, he was ready to take them. We're very confident putting the ball in his hands. We know he's going to make big shots. He's been doing it all year. And we need him to score 20, like Coach said, in the tournament in a couple -- a week, I guess. Yeah, it's a week away.

MASON FALSLEV: I just agree with him. It's awesome when MJ can get to his shots. And obviously everyone tries to stop him, but it's pretty awesome to see throughout the season he's been able to do what he's done.

Q. Drake, what's allowed you to be as efficient as you are, stuffing the stat sheet with the way you've been scoring, rebounding, stealing the ball as much as you have?

DRAKE ALLEN: These two guys right here and the coaches and glory to God. I'll say that before anything. I've been very blessed to be in this situation, to be in the spot that I'm in. So glory to God. These two guys right here, they take on a lot of pressure. A lot of people key in on them so it leaves me open a lot of times, leaves me with a lot of space. On defense I try to be as active as I can, set the tone, and usually when we're active on defense it gets me going on offense.

Q. MJ, what does this MVP on top of everything else mean for you? Because I know that you guys have been focused on team accomplishments, but you were someone who for much of the season was looked at as a Player of the Year candidate, a First-Team Mountain West candidate.

MJ COLLINS JR: It means the world, but it also shows how good our team is. Mason got Mountain West Player of the Year, and then I can come and get the MVP.

I know you said we look at team accolades. This is a team accolade. I wouldn't be able to do it without them, so I'm thankful for them and Coach Calhoun, of course. Like I've continued to say, the fans travel for us. On their spring break, they gave their time up to come and support us, so it means the world.

Q. MJ, when you hit those two big threes down the stretch in the game, that pretty much was the difference maker. How did that make you feel? Were you elated? What were the emotions in that moment?

MJ COLLINS JR: Yeah, it made me feel good. I got to



chirping a little bit. But just credit to Coach; he always tells me to make the right read. As I'm coming off the pin-downs and I'm taking a rearview peek at Reese Dixon to see how he's guarding me, I curled one of them, hit the three. And the second one he tried to shoot the gap, and I bumped it. A great screen by Zach, great pass by Mason, and the shot goes down. It's a big swing because it was a five-point swing right there, Zach goes to the line, hits two free throws. So it was huge.

Q. Down the stretch of the regular season you really kind of struggled with the fundamentals you wanted to do, especially in the paint and then on the turnover margin. Then you come into the tournament and really dominate both those areas and then forced a lot of turnovers and got a lot of points off that. What did you do to adjust in those three, four days in between, and how did you see that and really get back to your fundamentals this week?

MASON FALSLEV: Yeah, I mean, we looked at our regular season. I think a lot of times when we took bad shots or maybe didn't do the best offensive plays, it led to the other team getting good defensive plays. I think everyone bought in and just said, look, we're not settling, we're going to get to the paint and we're going to play off two and we're going to make the right plays, every play, possession after possession. I think that's why we were so successful the past three games.

Q. Coach talked about not getting bullied was something down the stretch of the regular season, you had a couple games where you guys got bullied, but in this tournament you can't really say that about any game. What was it like for you guys locking in to make sure you guys didn't have what happened late in the regular season happen in the tournament?

DRAKE ALLEN: I think it's just a mindset, you know? We came in the last couple days, and we were watching the game last night, and it didn't matter who was going to win, we owed whoever came in today, we owed it to them to kick their butts, really.

Every game we've been on edge. They out-rebounded us a little bit in the first half, and you've got to adjust. They got us pretty good on some free throws. We just got to keep battling. And I think that our team was very resilient. When bad plays hit, we didn't duck our heads and run away from it. We just keep on going through people's chests and keep on boxing out and keep on playing tough.

Q. For either player, 17 points off turnovers. How satisfying was it to answer SDS's push? I mean, they didn't have a steal since the first five minutes of the

game. What was that like for you guys?

MJ COLLINS JR: That's our defense. We know we've got to get out in transition, get easy buckets. So when we were able to turn teams over, it makes everything much better. We get going, and it's like the defensive energy gets contagious because we're just flying around and playing green.

When we can turn a team over and also take care of the ball, I think we're unbeatable.

Q. Drake, talk about the start of the second half. You guys went in at halftime down a point, momentum was -- really struggling end of the first half, but you scored seven straight points to start that second half.

DRAKE ALLEN: Yeah, great job from Coach. We had a Spain action coming into the second half. And he just told me, Make your reads. Kind of what MJ said. Coach gives us a lot of freedom. That's why on offense we can be so dangerous.

And that was the read. We had a great back screen. I think it was MJ. Great screen on the big letting me get downhill. And then the next play, another draw-up, and, you know, they fall asleep on defense and was able to step into a wide-open three. And it was off the dribble, right, Coach?

JERROD CALHOUN: Correct.

DRAKE ALLEN: No, so just great drops, and yeah, it makes it easy when the drops are good.

Q. Just wanted to ask you guys about the rebounding battle, maybe especially MJ and Drake. Down the stretch that was kind of one of the things that would tip your games, but then you come in here and dominated everybody in rebounding, and it really started with the guards. You guys combined for 16 or 17 rebounds last night. What was the focus on that like?

MJ COLLINS JR: We know if the guards rebound, we can push it. Coach has been on my behind about rebounding, so I just came in -- you know it's winning time. You put everything out the door, whether it's scoring points or -- you know what I'm saying? So when it's winning time, just make all the winning plays. That's what we came in this tournament to do, and it showed tonight, the night before, and also the night before. Just being able to follow the game plans.

But of course, the focal point was don't get bullied, and we didn't get bullied, and that's why we're the champs.



DRAKE ALLEN: I think also you've got to give credit to our bigs. They do most of the dirty work down there. We just get to fly in and grab them. Big shout-out to those guys. Those guys battled all night. And sometimes it doesn't show up on the stat sheet when we just run in and jump in there and grab them. So a huge shout-out to those guys, too.

Q. Just curious about you guys' mentality tonight, sort of getting punched and then punching back. I think back, I think there were two different plays in this game where an Aggie player gets blocked and then goes back and blocks that same player on the other end. I think there was at least one of those with Karson and Pharaoh Compton. Just talk about that mentality of as you get beat by the other team kind of going back in and getting in a punch in of your own.

MASON FALSLEV: For me personally, I think it all started with UNLV. I think that's where we came together as a team. UNLV was throwing punches at us, and we saw one another step up for each other. And it just kind of continued into game after game. I think that's what we saw tonight.

Q. Coach, you saw what San Diego State was doing against their previous two opponents, especially inside, limiting any shots inside really. You mentioned you wanted to be the aggressors, be the bullies today, and I think you -- let's see --

JERROD CALHOUN: We got 46 in the paint. We doubled them up. We doubled them up.

Q. Not easy to do.

JERROD CALHOUN: No, not easy to do. It's not easy to go 4-1 against San Diego State in two years. We're batting a pretty good percentage against Coach Dutch and his group, to be honest with you.

You have to match their intensity. We don't have the physicality, right, the strength, but our guys had heart. Our guys had attention to detail. There's a process to win a game, right. There's a mental game, there's a physical game.

In the hotel, we were locked in. Our guys were very, very locked in for 35, 40 minutes, and they didn't like the way the game ended at San Diego State in the second half. They embarrassed us. They outplayed us. They out-coached us. Our guys were just not going to let that happen today.

Very, very proud of them, taking the process of winning a game very serious and carrying out a great game plan. But I do think Coach Dutch and his group is an NCAA Tournament team. I'll say that over and over. If that team gets in, they're very dangerous.

Q. Kind of a similar question, but we talked last night about getting back to basics. What was it that you told your group before the tournament and continued to harp on the last couple days?

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, I told them what you said, quit launching threes. It's a real simple formula, establish yourself in the paint, whether a post-up or a drive, get two feet in the paint, collapse the defense, and get the ball on the rim. Get the ball on the rim.

They switch everything, and I talked to Joe Mazzulla about this. I talk about him a lot because I think he's one of the best coaches in the world, and I have access to him pretty much whenever I need him. He talked about switching defenses and it's the hardest thing to go against, not just college players but NBA players. When you switch everything, you have a mismatch on the glass. You've got their bigs around the perimeter.

I thought we did a really good job competing on the glass. We wanted to play extremely fast. We knew we had to steal the basketball and get out and force tempo. We don't want to get the Aztecs' defense set. It's one of the best defenses we see every year.

We know it's going to be a grind-it-out game, so we've got to get out, run and steal the basketball. But against mismatches, we ran some Spain action, as Drake talked about, we ran some in-screen action. We did some things strategically -- I think Mantoris Robinson, Ben, and Max don't get enough credit. Johnny Hill is tremendous. Curran Walsh is maybe one of the best review guys in America. We're batting about 90 percent on reviews.

Those are big plays. Those are momentum plays. They chant my name, I have nothing to do with it. They should be chanting Walsh, Walsh. The guy is an absolute stud on that stuff.

Our staff is very connected. They know our system really well. And we're able to adjust throughout the game, whether it's Spain action, in-screens, off-ball screens, isolations.

We can score in a variety of ways, but switching is difficult. I thought we did a nice job of making reads tonight.

Q. Just wanted to ask you about kind of maybe the

mental and emotional toll that a season like this -- I'm remembering back to the UNLV game leaving the Spectrum at 2:00 in the morning and the truck is still there and coming in, needing a coffee after the game. What has it been like this season?

JERROD CALHOUN: It's a little bit different than most sports. It starts -- now it'll start in April or whatever with this portal. It's never-ending. College basketball is never-ending. You get about two to three weeks off.

It's a challenge to get a group of guys that want the same common goal. So when you're able to accomplish made history today, and Utah State history, you don't have time to enjoy it. Tomorrow is going to be an unbelievable day for our fans. We should pack the Spectrum. Our student body is on spring break. They probably need a couple days off, like us. The HURD has brought it all year long.

Tomorrow is just a celebration. It's a celebration, but it's go time. It is go time. We need a day off, maybe two. I've got to call some coaches, get a good game plan on that. But we need a good seed.

I hear all these coaches talking about their team. We just won the regular season and the tournament. We've got 28 wins with great metrics on both sides. We'll see if we get rewarded. I'll be anxious to see what kind of seed, what kind of matchup. But our guys will be ready.

Momentum is a powerful thing. We've got great momentum right now.

Q. Throughout the season you talked about some guys like Zach or Tucker, you'd say this person is going to win us the game during the season, and we've seen that from Zach, Garry tonight. How important is having depth with those guys to being able to win the regular season and conference tournament?

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, Kolby King yesterday was unbelievable; Garry today, unbelievable. Tucker Anderson has timely shots. Elijah Perryman has had huge moments, Karson Templin. The strength of this team is its numbers, and it's a team. There's very few team-teams left. There's a lot of teams that have talent, but they don't have both. They don't put we over me.

These guys have done that time and time again. I've said it over and over. This is one of the most connected groups I've ever been around in the history of my head coaching career and my assistant career.

We're going to get back to Logan. We're going to take tomorrow off physically. But it starts again tomorrow night.

We'll be drinking more coffees, and we'll be in Estes. You don't sleep as a coach. How could you? This is the greatest time in the world for college basketball coaches and players and fans. Buckle up; the next three weeks could be really good.

Q. Coach, one thing we've already talked about today is turnovers. Just six turnovers for you guys against a San Diego State team that's top 25 in the country in forcing turnovers. It seems like throughout this tournament you've really been attacking teams' strengths and not just their weaknesses and how that's allowed you to really take control in these games.

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, really good point there. To only have six against San Diego State, that's pretty incredible, to be honest with you. I was waiting for Dutch to crank up the press. I was shocked they didn't go to that early. But it is everybody's third game in three days.

But I think when you don't turn over the ball, you have great focus. So when you don't turn the basketball over, you're really locked into the game plan. I thought our guys are really locked into the game plan.

We kind of collapsed at the end of that first half. We watched every single offensive clip. I was not happy with some of the things we were doing at the end of the first half.

I thought a big momentum change in the game was when we had EP in there and Kolby and Garry in that first half. Those kids had great belief. They came in there and extended the lead, then we kind of gave it up at the end of the first. So out of the gate I thought our adjustments but just our passion to want to go win the game was incredible in that second half.

Q. These types of things are not new for Utah State or its fans, but typically it's followed up with who will be back next year, including coaches. As you potentially weigh your options moving forward, how have the experiences from this season and particularly the last eight days maybe impact that choice going forward?

JERROD CALHOUN: Yeah, I think when you spend all your time doing that, you really lose sight of what's ahead of you. Like tomorrow at 4:00 we're going to have a draw and we're going to figure out, okay, who are we playing. We've spent all this time developing this team, individual workouts, team retreats, non-conference games, conference games. I think too many people worry about that stuff.

We're not going to do that. We haven't talked about portal, we haven't talked about anything. Our focus has been day by day, kind of like Bryson Barnes said.

It is what it is. Utah State is a great program and with great success. There's going to be a lot of chatter about everything.

I think our focus needs to be on the Selection Show tomorrow and get ready for the games. We're not looking ahead. We're going to keep our nose down. We're going to really dissect who we played tomorrow, and we're going to go attack it.

As you guys see, this team has a real shot. We don't want to be just happy to be in the tournament. We want to make a run and make history again and get to a second weekend, which has never been done.

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