

# Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Thursday March 14, 2019

**Brian Dutcher**

**Devin Watson**

**Jeremy Hemsley**

**Jalen McDaniels**

**San Diego State Aztecs**

San Diego State - 63, UNLV - 55

THE MODERATOR: We're joined by San Diego State head coach Brian Dutcher and student-athletes Jalen McDaniels, Devin Watson and Jeremy Hemsley. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH DUTCHER: First of all, I'd like to thank our Aztec fans. We travel well and it makes a difference in a close game to feel like you have that kind of support, that kind of enthusiasm behind you. And we have a great fan base and it's great they were here, and I'm sure they'll be doubled by tomorrow. So we're looking forward to getting more Aztec fans in this building for our next game.

The game was hard fought. When two opponents know each other this well then it's going to be hard fought. Nothing came easy. Marvin had his team prepared. They defended us as well as anybody defended us all year. We shot 29 percent for the game, still managed to win.

At halftime I was concerned that anybody other than the name McDaniels or Watson was going to score a point. They scored every point but one for us in the first half. And Jeremy Hemsley, who got to his spot all game long and couldn't get anything to fall, maybe hit the biggest shot in the game when he made that 3 when it was a tie game. He rolls up at the end of a shot clock and made a huge 3, and that's what senior guards do. They step up when it's most important. That's what Jeremy did. He was great all game at the defensive end and stepped up with a timely 3.

The biggest stat to me of the game, and I made a point of it at halftime. We were down 11 rebounds at halftime. They had 10 offensive rebounds. We outrebounded them by one for the game and they only had one offensive rebound in the second half. So rebounding was the critical stat to the game in a hard-



fought game.

Even though we didn't make baskets we found a way to fight our way to the foul line. We shot great from the foul line. And rebounding the free throws was the difference in the game for us. Excited to move on and an opportunity to play Nevada for a third time this year.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

**Q. You guys have, I think, 15 out of 16 times, you've got so many wins in this building not, only against them but in the conference tournament. First of all, do you think you have a mental edge against UNLV? And also do you think, is there something about this building that you just feel comfortable?**

JALEN MCDANIELS: I feel like we've just got to play like this every game, just playing hard and just executing and playing good defense and rebounding. I feel that won the game. We're familiar with playing in here, and shout out to our fans for traveling. And coming to feel like a home atmosphere here. So we respect them for that.

DEVIN WATSON: I definitely like playing in this gym. It's a great atmosphere especially at this time. Yeah, it's just fun out there.

COACH DUTCHER: We have a lot of good memories in here -- winning the conference tournament last year. And the extra games in here obviously as much as everybody complains about Vegas' home game, we're playing a lot of games in this building, and we're getting familiar with it and we're feeling comfortable in it.

So the extra games in here obviously make it nicer for us when we come in. We're familiar with the locker rooms because we're playing in here twice a year. And the familiarity has helped us.

**Q. Devin, your shot fake, by now everyone should know it's coming, yet you still get people up in the air. Just talk us through what happened; you got the switch on Nick Blair and you're able to get them up in the air. Are you surprised people still go for it?**

DEVIN WATSON: The one in the second half?

**Q. Two minutes left.**



DEVIN WATSON: No, I'm not surprised that they still go for it, because they know I'm a good shooter. And if they don't go for it they know I'm going to shoot it.

So I just got him on a headsy (phonetic) and then I pump-faked, and normally they jump straight up, but he jumped forward. So, I knew I was going to get him. And it was a big play.

**Q. Jeremy, you have to defend that sometimes in practice over the years. Why is that shot fake so good? Even after watching it on film people still go for it?**

JEREMY HEMSLEY: The trick to a good shot fake, you gotta have your eyes on the rim and you gotta really look like you're shooting it and that's just how it looks. If you're defending and you're in the flow of the game and you think he's going to shoot it, you're just going to jump. That's just how it goes.

But he's obviously good at it. And it's something that he's practiced a lot and something that comes natural for him. It's hard for any defender to guard that, especially if you think he's about ready to shoot the ball, sure.

**Q. Jeremy, the game is tied, under four minutes to play, you haven't made a shot. Talk about taking and making that 3-point shot there to give yourself the lead?**

JEREMY HEMSLEY: I know my teammates and my coaches believe in me. Even with me missing the shots, not one time did I hear to stop shooting or to stop being aggressive. So the clock was winding down, and I've been here, this is my fourth year here. I'm comfortable taking that shot if the clock is winding down. And I know my teammates believe in me too. So it's just really believing in yourself at that point.

**Q. Jalen, you had your lowest scoring game of the season against Nevada. You talked about how you needed to step up. What mentally switched in the last four days for you?**

JALEN MCDANIELS: You know, just staying in the gym, you know, working on my game. I know that translates to on the court. So just doing that I feel like it really helped me. And just gotta keep it up.

COACH DUTCHER: Against Nevada, Jalen had quality looks. He maybe had one bad shot against Nevada. Every other shot I'd let him take every time and encourage it. And he just couldn't get one to go. So hopefully he's seen a couple go in now he's back in his rhythm and he'll get the same looks tomorrow when we play them.

**Q. Jalen, the first half seemed like the entire team**

**was struggling. Did you ever feel like when the team was struggling you need to shoot the ball more and be more aggressive than you normally are?**

JALEN MCDANIELS: I felt my teammates just put me in the right position for me to score. If I'm at my spot I'm going to take it and make it most of the time. So I feel like my teammates just getting me open and recognizing that.

**Q. What was different in this game, because you were in a similar situation last week against Fresno? You had the lead with about a minute left. How were you able to close this one?**

DEVIN WATSON: Just from experience. Like, you bring up that game, just from experience knowing what to do, how to do it. I felt like we were locked in focused. We knew everything was going to happen because we've been through it before. I think we did well.

THE MODERATOR: Questions for Coach.

**Q. Knowing now that you guys play Nevada tomorrow, did you watch the game earlier today? And if so, what did you take from that game that you can work on to be ready for tomorrow?**

COACH DUTCHER: I didn't get a chance to watch much of it, just a little on the TV in the locker room. I had my assistant coaches here watching them. We played them a week ago. Not a lot we have to prepare for, just do a better job executing our game plan than we did the first game.

Obviously Nevada's greatest quality is they play hard. They're one of the hardest-playing teams in the country. So they never give in. They never give up. They believe in themselves and they're grown men. They play like it. It will be a great challenge tomorrow, but one we're excited for and look forward to it.

**Q. There's a lot of talk in Las Vegas about the job status of Marvin Menzies. I know you guys are close. You just beat him. You've been pretty outspoken this season about the job he's done. Do you think it would be unfair to fire him now?**

COACH DUTCHER: I think Marvin's done a great job. They finished even with us in the standings. He's built the program every year. They're better off this year than they were the year before and the year before that. And they're trending up. They have the majority of their team back.

And so I'm not here to try to lecture and say Marvin should be the coach or shouldn't be the coach. I'm just here to say he did a great job. And they guarded us well. They ran a great game plan and we hit a couple timely shots.

Jeremy's 3, if that doesn't go in, what happens? Nathan Mensah on a rebound gets fouled, throws it up and it goes in. Basketball is sometimes a game of a bounce or two. And I would hate to think that Marvin, because he lost a tough game at home, should even be worried about his job status.

**Q. You mentioned it before, but can you talk a little bit more about Jalen and Devin's performance, especially in the first half?**

COACH DUTCHER: I was most worried about Devin because Devin hasn't practiced since Nevada. He missed all three days of practice, and usually I'm a guy that wants to see reps in practice so I'm comfortable. We called the first play of the game, a new one we put in. We haven't even gone for the jump ball and Devin said, what am I supposed to do on that?

That kind of gets a coach a little apprehensive. But Devin is Devin. He's a fifth-year senior. You rely on experience, even though he didn't practice. You rely on his ability to make game-time decisions which he did.

And Nathan Mensah, obviously, he practiced one day leading to the game and I thought he was great. Nathan made some timely blocks and big rebounds. It was good to see him play well somewhere other than Viejas Arena. So hopefully that will trend well into tomorrow's game for us.

**Q. This week you were mentioning how Devin and Nathan were banged up. What's their status looking like for tomorrow's game against Nevada?**

COACH DUTCHER: I think Devin is still banged up. So we have our medical staff here. I like this 2:30 game. And I wanted a third seed. But this 4-5 game playing at 2:30 in the afternoon is great, instead of playing at 8:30 at night. It gives us time to get in for treatment and prep for the next game.

And so even though I wanted the third seed, I think sitting here in the 4-5 game was better for us. At least it was today. So we'll see if that holds true tomorrow when we're playing the No. 1 seed tomorrow. But I like the chances of getting treatment, having recovery time leading into tomorrow's game.

**Q. Is there a correlation between Jalen's performance and your guys' performance? Because you guys lost by 28 when he had a poor game. He puts up a show today, you guys win. Is there a correlation?**

COACH DUTCHER: At first, at Nevada, the only thing I was concerned about Nevada was I thought Jalen got a little down on himself and quit defending hard at Nevada because he couldn't get a shot to go in. I took

a look at every shot he took in that game and he shot great.

But he's played his best all year against UNLV. I think he had a career-high 30, and followed it up with 17 or 18 here. And then he had 25 tonight and 14 rebounds. And so for whatever reason this is a good matchup for Jalen. We've got to see if he can translate some of this positive into a good game tomorrow against Nevada where he struggled. And I think he's ready for that moment. I think he'll be ready to step up and play a really good game tomorrow.

**Q. The student-athletes talked about it a little bit, but what's it like having the Aztec fans come out and make it feel like Viejas?**

COACH DUTCHER: We have great fan support. They travel and I knew it wasn't -- it was great today; don't get me wrong. But when I think about what it's going to be like tomorrow, I just smile and shake my head because I've been coming here for maybe -- what is it, 17 of the 20 years of this event. And the Aztec fans travel and they travel well.

So I'm excited to see how many find their way to Vegas tomorrow for our tip-off. And I think that will be a huge advantage for us.

**Q. What's the biggest adjustment just so a 28-point loss won't happen again tomorrow?**

COACH DUTCHER: A 28-point loss is a 28-point loss. I can say what I want. Honestly with a eight-minute time to go in the game at Nevada, I told the team if we could just get two stops and get the next two baskets and cut it to single digits, we'll play ourselves back in the game.

Well, they hit a couple more 3s and got rolling. And that was it. I thought we were in the game. Even though it didn't feel like it to a lot of people that watched it, I thought with eight minutes to go, in a 13-point game, we were in the game. So we have to try to keep it close tomorrow, so it's a close game down the stretch and give ourselves an opportunity to win the game late.

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## Marvin Menzies

## Amauri Hardy

## Joel Ntambwe

### UNLV Runnin' Rebels

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THE MODERATOR: We're joined by UNLV head coach Marvin Menzies and student-athletes Amauri Hardy and Joel Ntambwe. Coach, an opening statement.

COACH MENZIES: Let's begin with congratulations to Brian and his staff and the players over in San Diego. I thought those guys played a gritty game and made some runs, and they did the right things to keep the scoreboard in their favor.

Their defense was really good, as evidenced by our shooting percentage of only 32 percent. However, I thought our defense was really good as well. We held them -- I don't think I've ever had a game where we held a team to under 30% from the field and lost. So, this is uncharted waters for me. That's amazing.

But obviously the fouls were what they were. And getting to the free-throw line made a significant difference, especially late in the game. And we're just very disappointed as a team, as a staff, and as a men's basketball program that we didn't come out successful. Thought we had enough weapons to do it but they had a few more bullets tonight.

So, we will open it up for questions at this point.

THE MODERATOR: Questions?

**Q. When you're struggling to shoot like that, do you start pressing after a while when they're just not going?**

AMAURI HARDY: For me personally I don't press after a while, being we was getting stops. In a game like that, you just hope they fall and continue to play hard and hopefully the shots fall in your favor.

JOEL NTAMBWE: I think we played hard but they just made some big plays, and they got the lead and won the game honestly. But at the end of the day we did what we're supposed to do; we held them to shoot 29,



or under 30 percent. We did a good job, but they made big plays.

**Q. Amauri, what's it like to be in a game where you know the shots aren't falling but you're one possession off in the entire game up to the final bell. You were in the game, but the shots weren't falling. What was that like?**

AMAURI HARDY: Stay the course, gotta stick together. Make sure we keep our communication high for the most part. The game was fairly close. So I wasn't really worried about my shots and I don't think my teammates was either. So in a game like that you just gotta keep grinding until the clock go down.

**Q. Coming down the stretch there was a lot of emotion from Kris and Noah. Once Coach addressed the team in the locker room, what was the message from the seniors?**

COACH MENZIES: The seniors didn't talk in the locker room.

**Q. Devin Watson gets that three-point foul and you obviously know it on film, seen it, played them twice on the pump fake that he does. How hard is it as a player in that situation -- it's easy for us to sit there and go, why are you fouling him with one second left? How hard is it and how good is that pump fake because everybody seems to go for it?**

COACH MENZIES: Is that to me or who is that to? Joel had one where you caught him. Can you answer that?

JOEL NTAMBWE: I think we had a great scout on him. But he's such a good player. He pump faked and I went for it. And they called a foul even if I didn't foul. At the end of the day he's a great player, and he went on the line and made his free throw.

COACH MENZIES: We'll take a look at them. And I think the officials called a good game. I thought they did a good job. I'd like to review those just for my own professional edification, and then we're always trying to get better, both the officials and the staff and the players.

So that's a tough call because the guy, if he's come down and he's landed, then he has the right to his verticality, the defender. If he's still in the air and the



offensive player creates the contact going forward, then he still has his verticality. But he's not in legal guarding position until he lands, which makes it a tricky call.

We lost a conference championship on that same exact play against Utah Valley one year when I was in the WAC. And it's a tough call. It's a tough call to get on a player and it's a tough call to call as an official. So we all are trying to do our best to do the right things, both sides of the coin.

So there's nobody's fault and I think Joel nailed it. He's a good player and he got guys up. Kept his butt down, got the ball above his shoulder and really sold the shot. That's what makes it a good shot fake.

**Q. Coach had said he felt disappointed in today's game. Wondering what your overall thoughts are on today's game and then what you're thinking about next season, what's possible?**

AMAURI HARDY: We played a great game, like I said before. For the most part I haven't really thought about really next year, trying to get over the loss right now. But the future is bright for all of us. The future is bright for Coach. Future is bright for me.

Once again, we played this team again. We played them down to the nail and unfortunately we couldn't get the win, but it is what it is.

JOEL NTAMBWE: Actually, I haven't thought about nothing right now. So I'm just going to let it be the way it is. We lost. I just gotta go back home and get my mind right. And that's all about it and talk to the coaches and that's pretty much it.

**Q. Is the most frustrating part for you just a basket here, a basket there you probably win the game -- just all those missed opportunities?**

COACH MENZIES: Pretty much. Pretty much. Just a collective set of emotions, you know, from seeing Noah and Kris leaving to just feeling bad for the guys, you know, not playing well offensively. We just didn't put it all together. We did some really good things.

Man, these last games of the season are always tough. There's a lot of people already eliminated. And we're one of those teams now. And it's a lot of lessons and a lot of opportunity to grow and learn from, not just your season but how to handle defeat when you lose too.

We just want to make sure that the guys stay together and stay a brotherhood and pick each other up and do the right things going forward. A great bunch of kids. Class acts, you know?

THE MODERATOR: Thank you.