

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday March 11, 2017

Steve Fisher

Malik Pope

Trey Kell

San Diego State

Colorado State - 71 San Diego State - 63

COACH STEVE FISHER: Always disappointing when it's over. It's always disappointing when you don't have another game to look forward to. And that's who we are right now. They beat us. We jumped out with that big early lead but I didn't think that they would wave the white flag and surrender. They did what everybody does, they competed and fought and made some big, big plays to come back and earn the victory.

Proud of our team. Disappointed that we're no longer playing.

Q. This is the third time CSU has been able to come back from 13 to beat you guys. Can you talk about what happened in the second half and what was different?

MALIK POPE: They're a good team. They made big shots. We played our defense, contested the big shots. So give them credit where it's due.

Q. How much of a factor was the injury in the second half? When you were out of the game it was a tough stretch for you guys offensively. How much did that come into play?

MALIK POPE: It didn't affect me at all. Injuries happen. You've got to bounce back, play for your teammates. We've got seniors back there. I just had to give them all I had. It's not over until it's over. And the outcome is what it is.

Q. How do you compartmentalize this season? You guys played great in stretches in this tournament; you didn't play so great in some stretches. How do you sort of balance all that out?

TREY KELL: It was a tough year regarding that. Just one of those things, our main thing for us is trying to be more consistent. And we wavered with that this year. If we had been more consistent we'd probably have a little more victories under our belt. But at the end of the day we came to this tournament and believed we could make it to Saturday and we fell a little bit short to



a good Colorado State team.

Q. They said they thought you guys would tire because you were playing three games in three days. And he kept telling his guys, They're going to get tired, keep at it. Did you feel the effects of that in the second half?

TREY KELL: To be honest, no. A game like that with what was on the line you don't really focus on the fatigue. Just at the end of the day you're just trying to make plays and help your team win. Obviously it doesn't help playing three games in three days. But that's not an excuse. They just made some big plays.

Q. You just said that you don't have another game to look forward to. Do you not intend to go to a tournament or on the slim chance you get an NIT berth?

COACH STEVE FISHER: I haven't thought about that. We're not going to play in anything other than the NIT, if we get an opportunity, and it probably won't happen. But if it does, then definitely we will play in that.

Q. You had a huge rebound advantage the first half and they had a lot of turnovers, they talked about turning those two things around. Did you see that as the key to what happened or did you see something else out there?

COACH STEVE FISHER: We struggled with consistency all season long. And we've had stretches where we've done different things that have been hurtful to us. And we turned the ball over too much. We had some good shots that we didn't make and they had some hard shots that they did make, and I think that was a huge factor to it, also. When it was a tie game at four or five minutes to go I know they had three three's in that stretch, Clavell, Omogbo, and Paige that were guarded, closely contested. And teams that win make plays like that. Those were not layups. Those were not gimmes, those were not freebies, they made those plays. They beat us up on the boards at their place. In the first half we did a yeoman's work on the boards. For whatever reason we weren't able to get as many in the second half. I think we only had three offensive rebounds in the second half. But they beat us.

The first two games we lost. When you lose the way you did, we say, could have, would have, should have,

but tonight they beat us. And I salute them and wish them good luck as they play tomorrow.

Q. In the second half you went with your starters for a while and you had a flow going. And you got into 7, 8, 9 minutes into the half. Talk us through the decision to go to the bench, keep those guys in there. Do you feel like they were just getting too tired?

COACH STEVE FISHER: I think you make decisions -- we've got a lot of guys that can play. And we've never played guys for a long, long, long stretch. We felt like we could add energy and add something when we went to the bench. You play guys -- you can't play guys for 40 minutes.

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Larry Eustachy Prentiss Nixon Emmanuel Omogbo Gian Clavell Colorado State

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COACH LARRY EUSTACHY: Well, we have to quickly put this game behind us. We've been here several times and it's worked out at times, hasn't worked out. There's a big difference.

We'll talk about today's game and give San Diego State all the credit in the world. They came out and forced us to turn it over. We couldn't keep them off the boards. They had the majority of their points in the first half off of our turnovers that they converted or off of offensive rebounds.

And then give our guys credit for responding and really doing what they said they were going to do during a timeout about not turning the ball over, keeping them off the boards and it was a terrific effort. And we thought that San Diego would get tired because it was their third game in three days. And these guys bought into what we were telling them and they just stuck with it. It worked out perfect.

But give San Diego State a ton of credit. I mean, we have as much respect for them or more respect for them than anybody in the league. I think this is the third time we've been down 13 and beat them three times. So it's just kind of remarkable.

But we'd like to talk about it for a while and then move on for something that either team moving forward has never experienced. Fenner, it's a big game for him. One time we beat them by 60 points, and I don't want to move on to the next game. There's a lot at stake for both teams, and we know what we have ahead of us. But there's really not a lot of time to enjoy this one.

Q. With everything that this program has had to deal with the last couple of years, what would it mean for you guys to come out tomorrow and win

the conference?

GIAN CLAVELL: It would mean a lot because everything we've been through, it didn't break us, it don't bend us, either. Yeah, it would be big time. It would mean a lot to us, especially we want to do this, of course, for Coach and for CSU.

Q. You guys had 8 turnovers in the first 12 minutes, and then ended up with 13 for the game. How did you guys cut back on that?

EMMANUEL OMOGBO: We went into halftime, Coach got on us for turning the ball over. In the second half we only had three turnovers and that was the difference in the game. And we had to rebound more and that changed the game around, when we limit them to just one shot.

Q. During that timeout early in the game when you got extremely animated, what was the message there? Do you think maybe that was the turning point in the game?

GIAN CLAVELL: Just play harder. Just concentrate on the game plan and just play, enjoy it, just have fun with it.

Q. Coach referenced that this is the third time you guys have come back from 13 to beat San Diego State. Were you telling yourself that you were still in it? Did you feel that you could still come back and win this game?

GIAN CLAVELL: Anytime we're down by any margin we feel like we can come back and win, that's just any team. But, yeah, we always say, Stay with it, chip away and just one basket at a time.

Q. You didn't turn the ball over at all against Air Force. You came out tonight and had a couple quick turnovers. Was that just nerves?

GIAN CLAVELL: No. Dakarai Allen, he's the best defender I've ever played against. I told him, when he fouled out, I got so much respect for him. You have no idea. And just they were in the right place at the right time. It's hard struggling so hard. So, yeah. The credit goes to their defense.

Q. Talk about what you guys have been able to do with the guards, perimeter-wise they shot almost 50 percent in the first half, but the second half you

locked down a little bit. And they only ended up getting one three-pointer in the second half.

PRENTISS NIXON: It came down to heart. In the back court we have some of the most heart. And it just came down to all heart.

Q. You've dedicated this whole season to your family. What's it mean to keep winning, keep playing, and really keep the dream alive of what you might still be able to accomplish?

EMMANUEL OMOGBO: It means a lot to me that the guys can do it for me and my family. But at the same time it's for them. At the end of the day I have to walk in my own shoes and my family always behind me, Coach Eustachy is always behind me.

I really just wanted to come out here and just play my hardest. Coach reminded me that I only had two rebounds at halftime, so I just wanted to come out and just play my heart out and just rebound, and that's what I did in the second half.

Q. Do you feel like this is where it should be, these are the two best teams in the Mountain West, and it should be down to you two guys?

COACH LARRY EUSTACHY: I don't know about that. We were fortunate that we made some incredible plays. We started screening Allen, because they switched their guards, so that made somebody else guard Gian, that changed a little bit. But there's so many good teams in the league. Nevada might be a level above everybody. They're awfully good, they're well coached and talented. I go back to yesterday about this league is strong. It may not have an UCLA, top ten team in it or Oregon, but it's deep. And those two teams that played before us are very special. And Boise State is really good.

So did the seeding make our conference look exactly right? Yeah, it did, just like I think the PAC 12 is similar. I'm not sure if Arizona is playing Oregon or not. I just know we have our hands full tomorrow. I know what we're up against, and we're up against it for sure, and that's why I want to get these guys to put this one behind them and try and understand what we're playing for, because there's a big difference between winning and losing that game.

Q. Playing so late tonight, is that a big disadvantage going into tomorrow?

COACH LARRY EUSTACHY: What time is the game tomorrow? 3:00. I don't understand why there's a 9:30 game. I think Craig came out and said we're going to change some things with the contract. But it's midnight these guys are going to bed. It's supposed to be about the student-athlete.

But we'll have no excuse. Both teams are tired, I'm sure. They played two really hard games. But it is a quick turnaround. With the adrenaline and what have you, it's hard to fall asleep, it really is.

But the biggest problem we're going to have tomorrow is not the time of the game or when this game is over with, it's going to be Nevada and who they have on that team. Marshall is going to be the biggest problem and then Oliver. So the time change or if we flew to China and played this tomorrow, that would be fine if we weren't playing Nevada. So the biggest problem we have at 3:00 tomorrow is Nevada.

Q. You've talked about all season how much respect you have for Coach Steve Fisher and what it meant to you when he came on the bus after the win at the Viejas. Can you talk about what it means to you after coming back against a coach of that caliber?

COACH LARRY EUSTACHY: Well, I don't think it's fair. There's no words to describe Steve Fisher. He's faced adversity in his profession. Obviously it's well documented what Mark is going through. You can't describe what he's tasted or doing. So this is just the game of basketball to him, compared to real life. We talk a lot. I understand him.

I've met a lot of great coaches. I've met a lot of people. And he's the finest person that I've met in athletics, forget about basketball coaches, forget about whoever. He's the finest man I've ever met in this business and one of the finest I've ever met in anything. If we had lost today I wouldn't have felt bad, because that would have meant he won. There's a real friendship there.

Q. He said he hasn't decided whether he's going to come back next season. Do you have a sense he might walk away or he's such a competitor he's not going to leave after 9-9.

COACH LARRY EUSTACHY: Well, we might walk away together, just between you and me. We've got a little beach house in Del Mar, him and I. So we may just be playing checkers and sitting out there with Mark and Lana and everybody. So, I don't know. I don't know.

He's so competitive. I can't answer that. But whatever he does, he's made his mark. I know he'll stay with San Diego State and be a part of their athletic department. The only school I could get into was San Diego State, that was the only one that accepted me at one time. I mean everybody else declined me because of my GPA. Now you can't get in there. And I think San Diego State basketball has had a lot to do with that. He has meant millions upon millions of dollars to that university through exposure and revenue and what have you. I hope he comes back, because he's good

for the game of basketball.

Q. Can you pinpoint what allowed you guys to overcome such a terrible start? Did Gian have a role in that in that timeout?

COACH LARRY EUSTACHY: Yeah, that was really big, you're exactly right. Sometimes my words fall on deaf ears, but Gian was very, very explicit. The ultimate competitor. The ultimate warrior at that moment. And that was the turning point of the game.

Then there was a point in the game when J.D. was out of the game and said a few words and I knew it was time for him to go back in the game and he turned it around, too. But that was the turning point. He wasn't going to let us lose today or at least make us aware of how bad we were playing.

Q. It seemed like there was a little looser feeling on the sideline even when you were down than maybe a lot of teams see. Even when San Diego State was off to that great start, Gian and you looked at each other and just kind of smiled and you started rolling, got looser and got back in your rhythm then. Did you have that sense, is that just because this team has been able to come back so much?

COACH LARRY EUSTACHY: He took about a 58-footer and, you know, almost broke my foot, because it missed the rim so bad. Any shot he takes is not bad, but I just kind of looked at him and said, Really, dude? And he just kind of laughed at me.

It's just an enjoyable group. I don't think that's nearly talked about enough. I've had a lot of enjoyable groups, but, yeah, we have quite a bond with him and everybody else and there's not a lot of them, so it's a neat bond.