

Mountain West Men's Basketball Championship

Saturday, March 12, 2022

Las Vegas, Nevada, USA

Thomas & Mack Center

San Diego State Aztecs

Brian Dutcher

Matt Bradley

Lamont Butler

Aguek Arop

Postgame Press Conference

Boise State - 53, San Diego State 52

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Joining us on the platform is San Diego State. Coach, your opening comments.

BRIAN DUTCHER: It was a heck of a game. Obviously, we're vastly disappointed we didn't win it. To get back to the hotel past midnight last night, come here and play at 3:00 o'clock, play as hard as we played for 40 minutes, gave our shot -- gave ourselves two shots to win the game. Unfortunately, we didn't get to convert those.

But I told the team after the game that the reason we play the season, the reason we try to win the Mountain West is to go to the NCAA Tournament. That is the crown jewel. And now that we're going, our intent is to go and win games in it.

So we're disappointed we didn't get a title. But our program plays to play in the NCAA Tournament. We have an opportunity to do that. And we will be ready to play no matter who we get in the first round.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Questions for our athletes?

Q. Matt, I'll ask you: Can you just take us through that final possession? Was the play designed for you, to take the fade-away shot?

MATT BRADLEY: I think I got a great look. You know, I got Aguek, got space, I had a wide-open lane to make a layup and I didn't finish it. So, yeah, I'd say it was designed for me to score, but unfortunately, I didn't.



Q. Matt, when you guys sometimes struggle a bit offensively as a team or points are hard to come by, does that change kind of the -- how that last possession feels, or can you, as a group, kind of wipe that away and it's a clean possession, are you thinking about what a struggle it's been offensively in trying to get points at stages in the game?

MATT BRADLEY: No, I think all of us know what we're capable of playing the way we were supposed to. We were confident in the second half, even though we struggled in the first. But, you know, we want to win the game ultimately. And regardless of who takes that last shot, we're all hoping -- we all have full trust that it's going to go in. I had it right at the rim and I missed. Yeah, I don't think it affected me. I just think I missed it.

Q. Lamont, I think you had a career high today. As it got down to the final few minutes, did you feel like maybe there might be a little momentum finally, or was it just kind of a grind all day?

LAMONT BUTLER: No, we had got momentum going into the second half. I mean, I felt we all had a hell of a game, you know, defensively. And then offensively, we got it going in the second half. And that's all -- we just got to finish at the end. And that's what it came down to.

Q. Matt, can you just describe like what this season has meant, just playing at San Diego State for your last year and what it will mean seeing your team's name called on selection Sunday?

MATT BRADLEY: It means a lot, you know. I've never been in an opportunity like this just to play in the Mountain West championship and going to play in the NCAA Tournament. So regardless of not winning tonight, I'm really proud of this team and them taking me in and the stuff we've done this year and stuff we're going to continue to do in the tournament. Yeah, it means a lot.

Q. Aguek, I want to direct this question towards you. This is obviously a very tough and, obviously, a very heartbreaking loss for you guys. And now with the NCAA Tournament coming up, how are you and your



teammates going to recover in time for the next game?

AGUEK AROP: I mean, obviously, this -- this loss hurts. We're going to let it hurt, but we're not going to -- we're not going to have a hangover about it. We're not going to let it drag us down, especially going in the NCAA Tournament. We're going to be need great energy, positive vibes.

So we'll let this one hurt, but let it motivate us as we go in the tournament. We don't want to feel like this ever again. We'll use that to launch us into the tournament.

Q. Matt, apologize if you've been asked this, but could you just take us through the last play and what you saw and how much contact there was on any of those plays?

MATT BRADLEY: Yeah, I think, you know, I made a move on Akot and I had space to just go down the lane and make a layup and, you know, foul or not, I should have made it. I was right at the rim. I missed two earlier layups the same way.

Yeah, I should have made it, I got the rebounded and Trey had a great look, too. We had two great looks at the end of it, but I definitely should have finished mine.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Time for a couple questions for our athletes if we have some. Okay, thank you gentlemen.

Now we'll entertain questions for Coach.

Q. Coach, can you just explain, like, what this competition during the Mountain West Tournament and the season just prepared you guys for the NCAA Tournament? You guys played one of the best bigs in Orlando Robinson the first round, a tough Colorado State team and, of course, Boise in the championship game. Can you just describe how those tests can help you guys moving forward?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, we've played in three close games. And close games are what you're going to play in March. So each one of these games gave us a different look, a different feel. I thought we defended really well in all three of them.

Obviously, we put them on the line too much. I think it was a 21-11 free-throw discrepancy, and that cost us. And they didn't make them all, or it could have been worst. But they got to the line more than we did.

We know they're going to be close games. We relied on our defense, it gave us a chance to win the game. And we

had as two good a looks as you're going to get with the game in the line. Matt Bradley down the middle for a layup, Trey Pulliam to his runner to win the game. We had two looks to win the game. Unfortunately, we didn't make either one. But that's basketball. But like I said, we can't dwell on that.

The most joy in the season is coming up in the NCAA Tournament. And like I said, we want to win conference titles. That's -- every time we take the floor, we're trying to win the Mountain West title.

But I also know we've won the title one year by three games, regular season, didn't go to the NCAA Tournament and that felt hollow even though we hung a banner.

So the reason we play in the conference we play in and the reason we try to win all these games is to go to the NCAA Tournament. And so now we have to embrace that, we have to, obviously, be disappointed tonight that we didn't hang a banner. But we have to put it in the rearview mirror tomorrow. We have to have excitement, energy, knowing that the best basketball is yet to come.

Q. Coach, you've been involved in a lot of physical battles in this conference over the years. Where would you rank this just as far as the physicality of this basketball game from start to finish?

BRIAN DUTCHER: It was a hard-fought game. Both teams are really good defensively. You know, nothing comes easy. And I thought both teams competed at a really high level. Obviously, important plays were made on both sides, important stops were made on both sides. And it came down to -- we had two shots to win the game and we couldn't make either one of them.

So it was -- the difference in all three games is our one-possession games and they got all three of them. So congratulations, Boise State. They have a really good team, they're well coached. They compete at a high level, like we do. And they got us this year.

So congratulations to Leon and his team. But we're going to get ourselves ready for the tournament.

Q. Dutch, can you describe when you get down to a final possession like that to win the game and teams are clearly going to look at Matt and defend Matt, how do you approach that and what is the challenge when a lot of people are looking for Matt to get the ball and take that kind of shot?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, I actually ran the play for Trey. Pulliam, I ran -- wanted hit him off a ball screen downhill,

try to see if he could create a shot for himself, Nate or a teammate. As he drove in there, he found Matt, kicked it out. Matt played a closeout, attack to the basket, got reach to the front of the rim. You can't get a better place for him than at the front of the rim shooting over a defender. He had a clean look.

Nate did a great job getting the offensive rebound. He kicked it right up top to Trey, and he shot faked, took the one dribble floater. That's his shot. So we had two shots, I thought, were as good as we're going to get in that situation to win the game. Unfortunately, didn't get either one to go in.

Q. It seemed like your three-point shooting -- it seemed more selective in the second half. You guys were almost perfect. Was there a message to the team about being more selective, or what kind of led to those shots?

BRIAN DUTCHER: No, Lamont shot the ball great. I thought Chad Baker turned down some three-point looks he had for the one dribble pull-up. And we tried to encourage him. But you get that open look, you're a shooter, take that three.

But, I mean, there were tired legs on both sides. It's not an excuse. Both teams played on extremely short rest. And it's hard to shoot on tired legs. That's obvious to anybody. So whether that affected us to a degree, I don't know.

But both teams gutted it out. You just knew what it was going to be. It wasn't going to be real pretty today, both teams having played yesterday, night games. Obviously, we didn't get back until midnight or later. And to play at 3:00, we knew what it was going to be.

We were just hoping mentally we could fight through and give ourselves a chance to win, which we did. We gave ourselves a chance to win the game, but didn't make the shot with the game on the line.

Q. Dutch, obviously, your attention now turns to the NCAA Tournament and Mountain West will have three, possibly four teams in. How important is this tournament in terms of the perception of this league going forward? It's one and seven in its last eight first-round games in the NCAA tournament. How important is it for teams not to just get there but to win games?

BRIAN DUTCHER: Yeah, we have to find a way to win games. Obviously, it's harder because we're not going to have high, high seeds. I don't think anybody in the conference is going to get a seed that is -- you know,

maybe we'll get a six if we're lucky, maybe.

But then when you play when you're playing seven, eight, nine seeds, that makes it harder, you know?

So there's always hope you get a high seed. And we had a high seed last year and I thought we had a favorable matchup with Syracuse because we shoot the ball so well.

And no one zoned us all year, and then we ran in their zone and we couldn't make a shot. So sometimes you got to just be careful what you wish for.

Whoever you play, you got to prepare as best you can and then go out there and play with incredible confidence knowing that you're good.

THE MODERATOR: We have time for one more question.

Q. Dutch, what's the difference between winning and losing a title game here in terms of the mental approach for those guys in the NCAA tournament? Do you have to talk them through some things to get -- can they hit the reset button after a loss like this or is that a different kind of thing you have to approach mentally?

BRIAN DUTCHER: No, we can set the reset button. It actually felt like we were a Power 5 conference this year. You know, so many times we go into this game and we know have to win just to get in.

And so, we're -- like, you look at all these teams, the Big Ten, the ACC, SEC, all the top seeds are getting knocked out. They know that they're there to play in March in the NCAA tournament.

So as badly as I wanted to win this game to hang a banner, I wanted to win it to have a higher seed so we could get seeded higher so we could have a chance to win games in the NCAA tournament. That's the ultimate goal.

We came here all these years ago and we still preach the message, we're here to play for a national championship, we're here to go to a Final Four. So our ultimate goal is to get to the tournament and give ourselves a chance to do that.

So that's the biggest goal. So winning the Mountain West is just a step toward that final goal.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. Thank you.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Thanks, everybody.



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Leon Rice

Tyson Degenhart

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Abu Kigab

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Boise State - 53, San Diego State - 52

THE MODERATOR: Coach?

LEON RICE: Let's do it. First of all, what a game. I mean, we've had some epic battles with San Diego State. And, you know, hat's off to them. They're great competitors and fitting for a game like this.

And, you know, I think both teams just battled and, you know, came down to one possession for us on offense, one possession for them. And it's only fitting that this team, you know, bows their neck and is able to get a stop on that last possession against a tough team.

And, you know, we had to compete with them on the glass. They were handing us our hats to start out with, getting a lot of offensive rebounds. And you can't beat them if you can't rebound with them. And, you know, we ended up beating them on the glass by three. And I thought that was huge. No. 12 got nine rebounds. That's pretty good for a guy of that size.

But these guys -- that's so typical of these -- this group, not just, you know, singling one out. But whatever is needed, they step up and do, no matter who it is. And they find what's needed and figure it out on the fly.

And, you know, old Chuck Pagano saying "of so what, now what" applies to these guys. They just, all right, what do we got to do, we'll go do it. And, you know, credit to the warriors that I get to coach that they can get it done on a -- you know, Eman twisted his ankle pretty bad, went to the locker room and, you know, I just knew he'd be back and



ready. And he gave his teammates everything he had.

And, you know, like I said, I hate singling one guy out, because every one of them does it. And, you know, credit to -- Tyson made huge plays down the stretch, and Abu is the MVP of the tournament.

You know, I thought they got underappreciated because there's so many good ones, you know, as far as all league. And there's so many good players in this league, too. So there was a lot of guys deserving. But, you know, of course, I'm bias. But I felt like our guys deserved a little bit more of a respect that way. And certainly came down here and, you know, we get an MVP and we get to cut down the nets again and that's because the guys I get to coach.

Q. Guys, just that last 20 seconds there, kind of a chaotic finish. A couple guys, take us through the final 20 seconds there and then when the buzzer sounded and you knew you were tournament champions and everybody stormed the court there, what was that feeling like?

ABU KIGAB: It felt great. We honestly get in those situations a lot when we're in practice and we scramble. And just another one of those situations and we've been in those situations before. And all we had to do is just execute and we did.

EMMANUEL AKOT: Yeah, the last possession, yesterday we watched a video talking about one more -- that we get one more stop, just go hard one more time. And we did that that last possession. We said one more stop and we're the champions and we did it. So it was a great feeling.

I thought about when I first got here and talking to Abu and Shaver, and even Mladen and we were talking about how we wanted to win a championship, that was something that they didn't do when we first got here.

So we just wanted to, you know, just do something great and we did it. And shout out to the whole team. It was just such a great feeling. I'm loss for words.



TYSON DEGENHART: We do something in practice called the perfect possession where we have to get one stop and get the rebound and that's what we had to do down the stretch. We've done it so many times in practice that we just knew what to do when it came time to do it.

Q. To piggyback off that question and your guys' answer. The two regular season games, roles were reversed where they were up close by one or two, you come down and win it at the end. Was there talk or did it -- for any of you, maybe not bring those games up, but sort of in your minds thinking, man, now the roles are reversed and maybe help or, you know, just -- that little twist? Because you guys said it was fitting it came down that way, but it was almost like the storyline was working the other way.

ABU KIGAB: I'd say -- can you repeat that question one more time? It was -- it was kind of a lot. I was, like, nah.

Q. The fact that the first two games they were winning close and you guys pulled it out, now the roles were reversed. Was there sort of a thought process that, wow, now the shoe is on the other foot and we have to really make the stop because it's almost they're going to be revenge minded?

ABU KIGAB: We've been in those situations so many times throughout the year and I was confident in my guys. Because, you know, when you have experience in those situations, it gives you the confidence to go out there and execute with a free mind. And that's what the guys did.

A lot of our games come down to a couple possessions, and I'm confident in every single guy down the line that they're going to do their job. And we did that today.

Q. You guys are really good this season at just focusing on what's next. But at this point, what's next is the NCAA Tournament. Just thinking about that, I mean, what are kind of the feelings that go over you guys knowing you've made it?

EMMANUEL AKOT: It's great to make it. What's next, really, is recovering. Practicing, that's what's next, not the NCAA Tournament. We're definitely happy that we punched our ticket, but there's a lot of work left to be done, still.

Q. What's it -- kind of along those same storylines, Abu you wouldn't flinch, you barely even smiled the last two press conferences after your wins. Do you give an inch today and celebrate this one knowing that -- I mean, you said the job wasn't finished, the job is finished now.

ABU KIGAB: The job is finished now. I can smile. But, yeah, we came into this tournament with a chip on our shoulder. We knew that we had to prove that we were the best. And we knew that we were going to get every team's best game. And starting with Nevada, they gave us a hell of a game, and then Wyoming last night, and today San Diego State.

And it was just a testament to this team. These guys keep fighting. They're -- everybody's a worker on the team. And I just can't say enough about these guys. You know, the unity, the commitment, the determination and relentlessness to just keep going, even when things aren't going well, it's just unbelievable. And I'm so happy to be a part of something special like this.

Q. Abu, congratulations on the MVP. But I was wondering what you thought of your teammates here? You got a great night out of Tyson tonight. Armus battled EK yesterday. Akot's been huge all weekend. And, you know, I could go on down the line. So I just wanted to get your thoughts on your teammates?

ABU KIGAB: These guys just do a tremendous job of being every single day. That's very hard to do at a high level, to come in there, execute at a high level, play at a high level. And we hold each other accountable, which makes us go and makes us a little different than other teams.

And our identities, the whole year, has just been defense and rebounding. And this game was all about defense and rebounding. I'm pretty sure we won the boards by three. And I believe San Diego State's 37 and one when they outrebound you. So, you know, numbers don't lie. Men lie, women lie, numbers don't. So...

Q. With 28.9 seconds left, this came down to defense, which you guys have talked about so much all season about you guys hang your hat on defense. Does it mean more that it required the whole team to make that last effort, to you guys? If anyone wants to speak that.

TYSON DEGENHART: Can you repeat that for me? I wasn't expecting to answer this.

Q. I guess does it mean more to you that you have to win it with defense as opposed to getting a game winning shot, you know, because defense requires a team effort?

TYSON DEGENHART: I think so. We really hung our hats on our defense this year. There's been stretches where we

held teams under 60 points a lot. And to have it come down to defense, it means a lot to our group.

ABU KIGAB: Yeah, it's unbelievable. It's our identity. And just to get to win the conference tournament with our identity, it's a real feeling. And, you know, it's like a Disney moment.

Q. Emmanuel, you guys really did a good job limiting Matt Bradley, especially in that first half. You played a huge part in that. What was kind of the game plan with dealing with him?

EMMANUEL AKOT: The game plan, we knew he loves to jab and shoot over dudes. He likes to get to his spots. And Abu did a terrific job, he's done a terrific job on him all season. Then my job was to help him out a little bit. So I've got to give a lot of credit to Abu, being the best defender in the conference, it always hard to against him.

Q. What does it mean to you guys to beat San Diego State three times in one season, a team that's really been one of the best teams on the conference and do it the way you guys do it on the defensive end, grinding it out, just doing better of, like, what they do just, like, playing hard-nose basketball?

EMMANUEL AKOT: You know, it was definitely great to beat San Diego State. You know, they're a great program. You know, they've won a lot of championships, been in the finals a lot of times. It was great to beat them.

But at the end of the day, this was about us. We knew if we stick to our identity and do what we do, we'd come out victorious and we did that.

Q. Abu you think about all the years that you played basketball and all the teams that you've been a part of, what makes this team so special?

ABU KIGAB: The unity. Everyone cares about the team. Everyone cares about the team. And guys are willing to sacrifice whatever it takes. And we all know that in order to win you have to sacrifice. And the guys have done a tremendous job of that. And, you know, it's who we are. I can't lie to you. It's who we are. You know, we got good guys from top to bottom.

And it's just an unbelievable group. It's an unbelievable group. It's rare to be on teams like this because, you know, not many people are willing to make those sacrifices in order to win. Sometimes you can be on a team that's not doing well and you can average 20 and it's whatever. But, you know, when you're winning, it's a whole different thing.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. We thank you, gentlemen.

Okay. Now we have questions for the Coach.

Q. Coach, you've coached for a long time. Obviously, you've a lot of big moments in your career. But you think of this last three-month run, cutting down the nets twice in a two-week span here and just doing it with the stories we're hearing about these players. What's this moment mean to you?

LEON RICE: Yeah, it -- like Eman says, it's hard to put it in words, really. Because these guys mean so much to each other and they do it for the right reasons. And they're just the greatest competitors, the greatest competitors. And that's unique, to get a whole group like that that will do whatever. Whatever the task requires, they'll just step up and get it done.

And, you know, they may not win every game and they may not make every shot, but man, you can always hang your hat that they'll compete and they'll stay together. And that's what you want as a coach.

And so just blessed to have the guys that I get to coach and the team that I get to have. So, yeah, I just can't say enough about these guys and how much we've enjoyed it along the way.

Because we've enjoyed the work, we've enjoyed the victories, we've enjoyed the losses together. Just the time we get to spend together in the hotel and film rooms and watching other games together. I've never had a team that just hangs out in the film room with you all the time. You know, it's kind of interesting. (Laughing). And, you know, the amount of time that we do it is really remarkable.

And so, like I said, I -- you know, you've heard me talk about these guys a lot in that way. But as a coach, you just feel blessed when you get to be with guys like this.

But, you know, it's been a lot of work for us to all trust each other and get to know each other and having all these guys red shirt. You know, just -- because it didn't just happen. I mean, it happened with a lot of work. A lot of work by them, for each other, and with the coaching staff.

I mean, I've got the greatest staff. I've got such a nice mix of -- you know, I call Burns and Duryea my old heads because you got, you know, the experience they have. I mean, you know, Mike Burns has been my defensive coordinator and the guy that gets stuff done all the time. And, you know, we changed this defense. And we made adjustments to what we do because of our personnel. And

it paid off.

And what a great coaching job those guys did. Coach Duryea, Coach Barsh, Lex, Red. I mean, they are the best in the business at their jobs. And, you know, we've had very little time to prep for this game. And some of the subtle adjustments they made really, really panned out and worked.

So, you know, there's a lot of great people that I'm around. And, you know, that always makes the head coach look good when you have that many good people doing their job at such high level.

THE MODERATOR: Okay.

Q. Leon, when you took this job 12 years ago, how much did you imagine a moment like this? And you, too, like Abu, you didn't really give us much looking forward to these last few weeks, super concentrated on the moment.

LEON RICE: Yeah.

Q. So how will you soak this?

LEON RICE: Well, it's funny when you guys said we're in the tournament. And I was, like, Oh, yeah. I guess we just haven't really gone there in our minds. And I forgot about the automatic bid that was involved.

It was just about the competition today, really. And that's what's made us good, doing that. But you're right, when you take over a program, you know, there's milestones that you got to cross. And this -- you know, we always love those milestones.

And to win the league outright and to win the conference tournament when the league, in my opinion, from top to bottom was the best it's been.

I mean, what an amazing accomplishment. And it took -- you know, you guys got to see a lot of upclose of what it took. But it took battles like that every single night. I mean, it really did.

And that takes so much toughness and so much -- you know, we never -- you look at all through this league, we never got blown out. You know, the games we lost, we lost on a last-second call, no-call, we lost on a missed shot. We lost on a -- you know, there was one possession. And that's remarkable.

You look around the country and some of the great teams. Like, Creighton beats Providence by 30 or whatever. And

I'm thinking to myself, Wow, my guys have never had something like that happen to them.

And it's a credit to how they've stayed -- like I said, they've stayed in those moments. But how competitive and tough they are. Because, hey, we had a lot more adversity than we always put out there, like I told you.

You know, there's -- and then you got Eman that goes off into the locker room with a badly sprained ankle. And they asked me at halftime about how his ankle was, I almost wanted to tell them, Well, if he's not coming back, I'm not coming back. But I knew he'd come back. I just knew some how, some way he'd come back.

And you know, we -- my staff made an adjustment, we flipped and put Shaver at the one. Because they pressure you the whole time. And now you got a bad ankle. And those guys picked up the slack.

Abu started bringing the ball up because they were double-teaming Shaver. And, you know, another so-what now moment for my staff and my players, and they figured it out.

Q. We heard about the last 20 seconds from Dutch's perspective. But I was wondering what your thought process was during those last 28 seconds when San Diego had their two looks at the final shot.

LEON RICE: I was thinking to myself, This is ironic that this is the way it's going to end. And I don't know, I just felt -- because I've been in this position with these guys so many times, you know, I felt, like, Well, they'll get it done, they'll find a way. And they did.

And when you have a team that does it so much, you'd be crazy not to think they're going to do it again. So it makes you feel pretty good as a coach when it comes down to that.

But I also know how good a team they are and how good of players those guys are and what a handful they are to stop. So I knew it wasn't going to be easy. But it never has been for us.

Q. After the game, you were trying to find all your players and give them hugs. And it was just crazy, like, how many of them contributed in some way.

LEON RICE: Right.

Q. I mean, you had Pavle come in when Eman was out, you have Lukas have a couple big blocks. The team effort that it took this week, how proud are you of that?

And how -- is there more kind of that that we don't even see?

LEON RICE: Yeah, 100 percent. And that's so special. You should see the pride that the scout team takes in their jobs. I mean, they're always there an hour before the team doing their jobs, getting ready. And they just don't get any credit for that.

They don't get to -- you know, they don't get to play game. They don't get to -- I mean, it's amazing. And, you know -- so it starts, like, there.

But then these guys that -- like, Naje, Lukas, Max, Pavle, Kasean, all these guys, their minutes come and go. But they're always ready. And that's hard.

And that -- especially in this day and age, you know, where guys don't -- you know, it's me first and then the team. These guys aren't like that at all. And that's why we win. It's remarkable. And they always step up when you need them most.

And, you know, like I said today, like with 12, we needed rebounds. Rebound, rebound, rebound, he goes and gets nine. And, you know, Eman's out, so we need more scoring, he goes and gets 17 and 13 in those first two games.

And Lukas, same way. We need more scoring at Air Force, he goes and gets it. Pavle, we need more -- you know, Naje last night, we're not here if Naje doesn't play the way he did last night.

And so, these guys get more credit and more limelight, but those guys are absolute stars in their roles. And that's so unique to have everybody buying in that way.

THE MODERATOR: Okay.

Q. Leon, I know you consider your program a family. But to be able to share this moment with your immediate family, what did that mean to you?

LEON RICE: Oh, it's so special. And wish Cade was here, but he's playing a game today. But we got Brock and Max, and Robin, the beautiful blonde back there. That's my wife, robin.

But it does mean everything. And, you know, when you have a kid on the team, it even makes you more of a family. Because they -- they're more comfortable around us. And they spend time over at my house when I'm not even there. You know, it's pretty special.

And, you know, when I took the job, that's what Dan Munson said. You know, I didn't want to -- leaving Gonzaga was hard. It was a family. It was like a divorce when I left. You know, we'll take that kid, you keep that one.

And Dan Munson, I'll never forget, he said, Well, you can create that at Boise. And that's what we have now. And that makes it pretty special.

THE MODERATOR: Okay. We have time for one more.

Q. Leon, when the all-conference awards came out, Boise State did not have a first-teamer.

LEON RICE: Right.

Q. We asked you about that and you said that you know who you would take. Abu and Eman logged over 100 minutes these last three days. Obviously, Abu winds up with -- the conference player of the tournament. And both those guys, you know, are all conference team members. Is that what you kind of meant by this? How much more does it mean to be on that type of team than the one we previously saw?

LEON RICE: Yeah, and they wouldn't trade any of those individual awards for what we got to do as a team. But, you know, of course, I'm biased. But, you know, I don't also want to disrespect the great players in this league. There are so many of them.

But, you know, the team that wins the league, I feel usually -- I mean, we don't win it without Abu and so I felt like he's deserving. It doesn't mean I'm -- you know, Roddy and Nod or -- I mean, I could go to, like, five or six other guys. Like I said, the league was the best it's ever been.

But my guys wouldn't trade any individual award for the things that we got to do, win two championships in one year.

THE MODERATOR: We thank you.

LEON RICE: Thank you, everybody.