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An interview with:



THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and take questions for the student-athletes.

Q. To both of you, you've been 13 seeds the last couple years, didn't work out that well. What's different about your team this year? Why do you think you will have more success?

DANIEL MULLINGS: I think that we'll have a little bit more success this year because we got a little bit more experience. We have a couple of guys, a couple returners and a couple guy that's been here, not only last year, but the year before this, as well. So, we have a little bit of experience, a little bit more experience than past years. I think that that could help us and work to our advantage.

SIM BHULLAR: Same thing, last year was a couple guys' first time being here and definitely the experience will help us being in this atmosphere and hopefully, we can go out there and win the game.

Q. Do you guys find more hope in knowing that last year this San Diego squad lost to a 15 seed, Florida Gulf Coast?

SIM BHULLAR: No, we didn't know that, who they lost to last year, but we are confident whoever we play in this tournament. We're playing

great basketball right now and I don't see why we can't pull off the upset this year.

Q. For both of you guys, what is the basketball scene like in Toronto and Ontario where you grew up, or is there a basketball scene?

DANIEL MULLINGS: I think the basketball scene in Toronto, it's growing and it's building up. Nowadays, you're seeing a lot of Canadians every where in the United States at a lot of Division I colleges. It's a great thing to see, especially just seeing all these young guys being able to get scholarships from Canada. Now being able to play and show their talents over here in the United States. So, I think that the culture is growing and it will only continue to grow and get better.

SIM BHULLAR: Same thing he said, basketball in Toronto especially, is on the rise right now. We got a great bunch of players coming out of there. There's a ton of players from Toronto on Division I teams all across the country and most of them getting pretty high looks even from the pros and stuff. So, I think we got a great group of players coming out of Toronto.

Q. To follow-up on that, being so close to Canada here, have you guys been able to of a lot of family members come down and do you think there's going to be a lot of Canadian support in the stands?

SIM BHULLAR: Throughout the year we had a couple of family members come out from all across the team, and hopefully we can get a whole bunch out here. We're not that far from Canada so a couple of my family will be coming over from B.C. and stuff, from British Columbia.

Q. For both of you, what worries you most about San Diego State?

DANIEL MULLINGS: San Diego State, they're a great team, a great defensive team as well. I think that we got to key in on them is

rebounding, because we know they like to attack the glass and they got a lot of big guards, especially that are 6-7 or 6-8. They have long arms and attack the offensive glass fiercely. So, we got to worry about boxing out our man before just running to the hoop trying to get the ball, as well as, we got to watch out for their press as well because they're dangerous on their press. So, we got to take care of the ball and rebound.

SIM BHULLAR: They got a great team overall. They're long, they're athletic. The press is really a part of the game that we got to focus on and box our men out and gain the rebound. Because that's another big thing that we got to focus on.

Q. You guys were talking about how their press might be giving you issues, is that the spot where you think you'll miss K.C. Ross-Miller the most, is ball handling?

DANIEL MULLINGS: Yeah, we'll definitely, he was a great addition to us in the back court handling that press, being able to break that press by himself at times. But since he's been out we have got, we have guys that have filled the role and filled that void and fill his role very good.

And they're good ball handlers as well, so that was a key when he got out was to be extra careful and take care of the ball more. So, I think that the guys stepping in are ready for that, as well.

Q. I'm sure you've seen a lot of double teams this year, because you're A. Big and can see over it and B. You're a very good passer, unselfish player, do you almost welcome when teams double team you?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Yeah, this whole year we have been making teams pay for a double team on us. Especially when they double off Kevin. He's a great shooter and especially he loves to cut to the basket and we're always trying to find him and he's very good at finishing at the rim. So, I think we kind of thrive off double teams and guys focusing on me on defense.

Q. Daniel, talk about what you think of Thames as a player and how important defending ball screens are going to be in this game for you guys.

DANIEL MULLINGS: He's a great player. I watched a lot of film on him so far and I know that he likes to utilize a lot of ball screens over and over and in each possession. So just being able to guard that and just get over ball screens and not

making any mistakes, that's going to be key for us. Because we know that he's a big part of their offense and he's an important guy to them.

Q. A lot of people look at 13 seeds and just say, okay, they're here for one game. What would you say to people who might overlook you and just kind of look at the seed and not look at the team, not look at game film? For both of you.

SIM BHULLAR: I think this year we got a great matchup for us. I think we match up with them well. We just got to go out there and execute the game plan that coach gives us and hopefully we can come out with the win at the end of the day. I don't see why not.

DANIEL MULLINGS: This is a great matchup for us and we match up well with them. For the people that just overlook 13 seeds, especially us, we're just not here for one game, we're a great team inside out. We have great bigs that are unselfish and then we also have good perimeter players, we got good shooters, ball handlers. So we're a great all around team.

Q. Daniel, you were talking about the importance of rebounding, but I have to honestly ask, how many kind of your boxing out mistakes sometimes get erased when you've got a 7-5 guy sitting in there?

DANIEL MULLINGS: Yeah, a lot of our mistakes get erased when we have Sim there to be able to back us up and bail us out. Also our other bigs, as well. But we know that going into this game we can't have very much of those mistakes because these guys capitalize on those mistakes and they will punish us if we don't box out. So that is a big key.

Me, along with the rest of the guards, know that that's our job, to help these guys out and take off some of the pressure by boxing out our guys, so they can get less hands on the ball so they can get it.

Q. Sim, what did you learn from last year's tournament game? You had, I think, four shots in that game. You're obviously more involved in the offense this year, but do you need to get involved earlier tomorrow night?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Definitely, last year was an experience thing for me. I guess I kind of let the atmosphere get to me, the level of

the game. This year I'm going to go in more calm and treat it just like it's another game. Hopefully, I can go out there and stay focused and try and get that goal of winning the game.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse the student-athletes and take questions for coach.

Q. If you can do us a favor and reminisce briefly about what it was like the first year with Coach Fisher at San Diego State sitting on that bench when the team would lose night in and night out, went 0-14, and if during those times also, were you confident that Coach Fisher could turn the program into what it has become?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Well, there's no question I was confident. I wouldn't have taken the job even though it was a very appealing job, I didn't take it unless I thought that it could be something that could be a special place, a diamond in the rough as they called it back in the day.

Coach Fisher was -- has the type of personality that he has today and he had it then. He's just an even keeled guy. Not too high with the highs and not too low with the lows. So he understood the journey that was before him when he took over the job. And he was quite often with the players that we had there, he never let them lose hope.

He never -- even though we were out, I was out 90 percent of the time recruiting, that was my niche that they needed at that time. They didn't -- he had other things, other roles for different guys, and mine was to go get players. That's why I was hired and obviously, there was some basketball component involved, but pretty much that was my deal.

So, but, the guys that were there at the time that he inherited, he treated them just as well as he would his own kids as well as the recruits. And that's the thing that stands out to me, it's just the -- and we have heard this a thousand times about his personality, about how he's just so solid and such a great guy. And you are hearing it over and over for a reason, because it's true. And that's kind of what stands out.

Q. It looks like you go all over the world to find players. Can you sort of talk about the philosophy of recruiting to New Mexico State and also specifically what's going on in Toronto.

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Right, well have I my own Lear jet that I own so that's why I'm able to do that. But let's not share that publicly. No, but, no, seriously, it was a niche that we knew that we needed. We needed to, in order to compete against the schools at a higher level, if we tried to go head to head with them, obviously, it was going to be a tough sell to try to bring a kid to Las Cruces, New Mexico over someone that had maybe more, not necessarily basketball tradition but a University that had more to offer in the way of a city or different things that the young adults look for now days.

So, we knew that we had to kind of re-invent our paradigm a little bit. As I sat with Doctor Boston in the beginning, we really kind of honed in on generating a culture of character, true Aggies that will spend four years and five years in some cases in reference to red shirt a year.

We knew it was something that we were going to do. Toronto, Paul Weir, Paul Weir, Paul Weir. I mean he's the reason that we were able to identify and secure top quality talent in Canada.

So I don't take any credit for that at all. Well, maybe closing the deal, I was pretty good at that, I guess, when he got them to the door. But, that's the reason we were able to be so successful.

Q. Coach Fisher, today just kind of confirmed he's going to come back next year. Final year of his contract and maybe even beyond that. Does it surprise you that he's still coaching and how long do you think he will go?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Well it doesn't surprise me, for sure. He will go as long as his, as long as Angie let's him.

(Laughter.)

He thinks he's in control there, but I think Angie is pulling the string on that one. And she's probably let him go a little bit more. So I don't know. Coach is one of those guys that just has a spirit that's just -- it's ongoing and very, very bright and he's just as passionate today in a practice as he was when I was there years ago.

So I don't see any real signs of slowing down, so I'm not really sure. Dutch probably wants him to hurry up and retire, but I think he's got some run left in him still. And as evidenced by him, by their appearance here once again.

Q. Talk about the impact from this year

from the that DK had and then recently with Ian?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Well, as you know, we have had those guys in the program only for one year now. Actually Ian for only a half a year with him transferring at midyear last year or I shouldn't say transferring, but starting his college career midyear last year. He wasn't eligible until the break.

And both of these guys are guys that are developing, quite rapidly, actually. And with opportunity, you know, they have taken advantage of it.

You look at Ian's journey here, he's been here and had to sit out and wasn't able to practice with us and really quite frankly was just on his own getting up shots and getting better.

But then once you get thrown into the fire where now you got to learn the system, the plays, understand the verbiage, all of the differences that exist from high school basketball to college basketball and the discipline and the accountability and so forth. So, it's only been a short time that he's really been playing on the college level, even though he's a Freshman, he's only been a half a season as a Freshman. So, to see him play as efficiently as he is right now is really impressive. He's got a great moxie about him for a young kid and has done some very good things for us in a short amount of time. DK, on the other hand, is a little bit more mature coming in as a Junior College transfer and typically we don't take Junior College guys. I've taken two in the seven years that I've been the head coach and but DK was special. Just like Kevin, the other Junior College player, they fit a niche of specific needs that we had when we lost our seniors.

He came in, competed for the position, earned the starting spot, and has never turned back. And keeps growing and keeps getting better. Not to go too long on the answer but being a Junior College coach, I understand the transition that it takes those guys to go to D1 it take as little while. But he's hit his groove right now. A little bit earlier than expected, so we're happy to have him on board as well.

I'm giving long answers because it doesn't look like there's going to be a lot of questions, just so you know.

Q. The one thing that San Diego State coaches have said and other coaches have said, is that you guys have a plan, very unselfish, very disciplined, and I don't always

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hear that about some of your teams in the past because you get players from lots of different places and try to put them together. What is different about this team and why is it able to be that way compared to maybe the way teams were before?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: We recruited that way. We recruited character, we recruited guys that, whether they're single parent homes or both mom and dad there, we liked the foundation that they had before they got to us. Hard to change a leopard's spots at 18, 19 years old. So they got to have a little bit of magnitude in terms of personality and good home training as my mom would say before they get to us.

And then it's much easier to get them acclimated into a new family, basically, and understand the concepts of team as the older folks in here know what a team is. This generation now is a little different with the way that sports is marketed. But, I'm from the old school and I really want family. A lot of coaches will preach that and teach that, but it's a core of our educational system within our team. And our guys have really bought into that. I think that's the reason that we have been able to have that kind of carry over that you just explained on the court.

Q. It's kind of ironic, but Mullings and Thames have the exact same points per game average, they're both all-conference players, would you mind since you're doing the long answers giving us a little compare and contrast there?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Kind of like the Lincoln/Kennedy deal, you know, it's --

(Laughter.)

I have no clue.

(Laughter.)

I do think that when you look at their versatility and athleticism, their basketball IQ, I think it kind of lends into why they have the numbers they have.

But I will saying they both have a great supporting cast. If they were on different teams, they probably would have different numbers. I think that lesser talent around them, they probably would have higher points. More talent around them, they, which would be tough to find, but you could see their line being spread over rebounds a little bit more and assists a little bit more. So I just think they know how to play the game, both of

them have good basketball IQ and they're both very mentally tough kids when it comes to the actual game. You look at wanting to take the big shot and things like that, they have that. Not all kids have that kind of cerebral demeanor, when a game's going on, where they can still see the game at a little bit different speed. And both of those guys I think have that similarity.

Q. You obviously got the two brothers over seven feet. I don't know if you do the like individual coaching with them, but what's the art of coaching a very large guy in this today's game?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Oh, just hire somebody that's really good at it. Keith Brown, he does actually, he kind of -- we separate our guards and bigs, we separate our offense and defense. I'm just the CEO. Paul's the minister of defense and Coach Brown's the secretary of offense and they do a great job. But, quite frankly, they, you got to surround yourself with people that know what the heck they're doing and have a lot of experience at it. But when we had Sim in the fold recruiting and were able to secure his commitment, I had a change in staff and I did search out someone that had a great reputation, a lot of NBA guys that I know, some old Snow Valley guys, I talked to a lot of people and took -- Coach Fisher taught me that. He said, if you don't have to decide tomorrow, then don't. Take your time. Make sure you got the right guy.

I was going to do his voice, but that might get You Tubed too much. But I do think that hiring Keith was a key piece of their development for us.

Q. We asked the players this too, what's different about this team? You've been number 13 seed before, didn't fare so well in the tournament, what gives you a sense that this game might be different and this team is different. What's different about it?

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Every team's different. Every year at the beginning of the year you got a new puzzle. And you put it together at the end. It's a different picture every time.

I guess -- I don't know what that we'll have the same result. We'll know after the game. But I feel good about it. I do feel like we're a team that has some a little bit more legitimate size, a little bit more versatility when it comes to a few or spots on the floor. We have kind of changed our system. I used to be a little more up-and-down. I had Coach Pitino's blueprint. And when you end up getting, I

don't know if a 7-5, 7-3, 6-11, 6-10 guys can play in that system real well. So we have had to adjust. We have had to do some things a little bit differently. So I guess at the end of the day the system that we're using with these particular players may give us a little bit more of an advantage.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, coach.

COACH MARVIN MENZIES: Thank you.
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