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An interview with:

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

Q. Winston, as the season went on and you guys kept winning and people kept asking you guys about being surprised. There were times you almost seemed insulted by it. Look, you knew we were going to be good. When though? When did you know, if you could talk about maybe like the open gym periods in the summer and you saw Josh and how good Xavier was and when did you know you were going to be good?

WINSTON SHEPARD: Me, personally, I knew we were going to be good after we lost in the tournament last year. We started back working out. Not too many guys took a break off, myself I went back home over the summer and worked out, but I stayed in touch with my teammates a couple times a day, a couple times a week. They were doing the exact same thing I was doing, working on my game. So, when I got back it was pretty much the same and everybody had just gotten so much better that I knew we were going to be a great team.

Q. What did that loss to Florida Gulf Coast do you to you. Not because you lost a game, but because it was a 15 seed that most people thought you would beat. How did that change you as player and as a team?

XAVIER THAMES: It changed us a lot. It kind of woke everybody up. Every game is not going to be an easy game in the tournament, so we know we have got to come out tomorrow and give it our all against a good New Mexico State team. But, we knew from that point on we can't take anybody lightly.

Q. Xavier, you started your career out here in Eastern Washington and you said you left Washington State for basketball reasons. Do you feel like you found those reasons at San Diego State?

XAVIER THAMES: Yeah, most definitely. A great coaching staff and a great group of guys here in San Diego, but I still got a love for everybody at Washington State and this area.

Q. What did you see in Coach Fisher and his program that made you decide that was the place to be?

XAVIER THAMES: It was just big family. I took my visit there and all the guys welcomed me, Chase, D.J., Billy and Malcolm, all those guys just welcomed me with open arms. So, as soon as I stepped on campus I knew it was one big family and that's what brought it to my attention.

Q. And then, even this past year, you seem to have improved greatly as a basketball player. Could you talk about what your development was like and maybe what clicked?

XAVIER THAMES: I been doing the same thing. I was hurt the past two years, but I've been working on my game each and every day and just going hard. So, just staying in the gym all the time.

Q. Xavier, was it a difficult phone call to have to make when you wanted to go, when you wanted to transfer to San Diego State, given that you had sort of had a chance to go there before?

XAVIER THAMES: Yeah, it was pretty difficult. I had a couple teams that recruited me

when I left Washington State, but Coach Hutson, he recruited me in high school and then once he found out I was leaving again, he jumped right back on it. So, I got to give a lot of credit to him and to Coach Fisher and the coaching staff for still wanting me after leaving Washington State.

Q. Winston, can you describe what the locker room is like after the Florida Gulf Coast loss when you walked in the locker room and before they opened it up to media. What were those five or ten minutes like and how did that change the team that atmosphere?

WINSTON SHEPARD: It was sad, man. The thing that hurt me the most was just seeing the seniors just crying and knowing that that would be their last game in college and it really hurt them to go out like that. So, I took it as a wake up call.

Q. You get a four seed, you're playing a 13, and the obvious thing is to think, well, we're playing a 13. How quickly did you realize that New Mexico State's a pretty good team and what have you learned about them just from watching them on tape about how good they could be?

XAVIER THAMES: I knew they had a good team early on in the year because they had beat New Mexico when they played at New Mexico. So I saw that they had beat them. And we watched them on film and they're a great team, they got good big men, also good guards, so we just got to come out and get ready to play.

Q. What stood out, what did you learn most from working with Aerick Sanders when he was at San Diego State's camp over the summer?

XAVIER THAMES: Well Aerick, we call him Eighth, he's a great guy, he taught me a lot of things and about Coach Fisher, before I got here. He just helped me work on my game each and every day. He would stay and rebound for all of us. He was just looking out for all of us on and off the court. So we miss Eighth a lot.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll dismiss the San Diego State student-athletes and take questions for coach.

Q. I wonder how important advancing in the tournament is. You speak a lot about your program and program versus team and just how important is it to win a few games here for the advancement of your program.

COACH STEVE FISHER: I have a quick question before that. Are coaches allowed in this room? When you talk about a program, I have got the guy that helped jump start our program (Indicating) and that's Aerick Sanders in the back, who was on my first recruiting class at San Diego State. And he epitomizes, Aerick does, what a student-athlete should aspire to. Graduated on time in four years, came in, no disrespect, with a broken jump shot and turned out to be one of the premier players in the Mountain West conference when he graduated.

He's now on Marvin Menzies's staff, but at New Mexico State and has done a great job with Marvin. So, I think we have got proof of the fact we have got a program all over the place. Guys that we have had are now Division I assistants, productive successful and Aerick is a classic example of that. So Aerick, we'll be enemies for 40 minutes tomorrow, but we love you to death and you know that. And if you win, we'll be your biggest fans and I know you will be for us if we win.

We want to win. We want to win. We want to come here and find a way to get a win and see if we can continue to grow the program. And that's our goal. I know that's Marvin's goal at New Mexico State to do the same thing. We're proud of what we have done. When all eyes are on you at this time of year, it seems like one win means a lot more than one win. And I understand that. So, hopefully we will do that for ourselves first, our league, we have got a great league.

Our commissioner is here, we got a great league. And our league last year got five in, only won two games. And everybody talked about, why did you get five in? But our league deserved five last year. We have two in this year and we're both good teams. So, long answer to your question, but we feel like we have proven that we have got a program that has sustained itself.

Q. Xavier and Winston were in here and they were talking about the impact of the Florida Gulf Coast loss. Mostly, from the standpoint, not so much they really took the team lightly, but that it proved that a low seed could beat a higher seed in the NCAA tournament. How much has that helped in preparing for a team that I know you, as coaches, are concerned about and how has that experience last year helped your players to focus on a number 13 seed that maybe doesn't

play like a 13 seed?

COACH STEVE FISHER: When we played Florida Gulf Coast last year, they became the story, the underlying story for the NCAA tournament. And I remember we came in before we played them and somebody that couldn't think of a better question said, what does it feel like to be going up against the most interesting man alive? And I just looked at them. And they won.

I don't think we -- to me, we're not the, I'm not thinking Florida Gulf Coast and what they did to Georgetown and then us. If our kids were not immensely impressed when we popped in the tape when New Mexico State beat New Mexico at New Mexico, then we won't win. But they were. They were very impressed with what they saw on tape with the team that was well coached, knew what they wanted to do, controlled the pace, tempo of the game, and were the better team that night.

Q. You were talking about building a program. You have a fair number of transfer players on your roster and have -- what's the art, I guess, to keeping a program going when you have players who might not be there from the start or for the whole time?

COACH STEVE FISHER: It used to be that there was a stigma of some type attached to schools that recruited outside of the high school ranks. You were not considered able to, or in with the -- be able to compete with the blue bloods.

Well, now the blue bloods recruit transfers. They take one and done's. They take guys who have graduated and have one year left. They take guys that played in a lesser league and take them in as transfers. All you have to do is look at rosters all across the country.

What we have done at San Diego State is we say, okay, what formula will work for us. And we have had a blend of high school players, Aerick Sanders was a high school player. We have taken Junior college players, and we selectively have taken four year transfers. We, for the second time now, have had a one -- have had a graduate, this year it's Josh Davis from Tulane, we had Garrett Green from LSU, a couple of years ago, that have come in to fill a void that was desperately needed.

So, saying all that, we have -- and Angelo Chol is sitting out from Arizona, who is a local, or San Diego youngster, who has come back home. But we signed four high school players in this year's class who are very good players.

So, I think we'll continue to take transfers. But, we have turned a lot of transfers down that

wanted to come, because we didn't think they would be a good fit. I think you can't just take the highest rated transfer that's on the market, on the board, and say we're going to win, because we're going to take these three guys that when they were in high school they were five star recruits.

Nobody's going to -- nobody wants to take somebody else's problems. But, if you know the kids and their families, I think you can do what we have done, and that's take one that you know is a good person, JJ O'Brien is a good example for me. I thought that he was coming to San Diego State out of high school. Went to Utah. Transferred, came back to us. I knew more about JJ than anybody in the country, because I worked really hard to recruit him.

Those are the kinds of guys for the most part, that we have gone after and taken and we have known a little bit about.

Q. Not that you need any reminders, but a lot of people talk about 25 years ago. I wonder if the number 25 means anything to you the way a wedding anniversary does in terms of the championship at Michigan. Do you look at that any differently now 25 years later? As you get older and as that gets farther away, how do you look back on that time?

COACH STEVE FISHER: Well, initially I couldn't believe that this is the 25th anniversary of that team. I remember we were in our arena, waiting for the selection show to come on and when it came on, it a little collage of different situations and different people, and I smiled and got goose bumps when they showed Glen Rice in that collage.

Sometimes in this business, you get lucky and I was in a position where I was not a rookie coach, I had coached since 1968. But, I was a guy that became a head coach, a head coach at the college level for the first time and then I became the story line. And Glen Rice and Rumeal Robinson and others led to us a National Championship, the first and only that they have gotten. I stay in touch with a lot of those guys. Terry Mills calls me quite often. He's doing color now on one of the Michigan network stations and Mike Griffin now lives in California. So, I stay in touch with them. Rob Pelinka is the hottest NBA agent known to man now and he lives in Orange County.

So, I've reminisced with them about their

careers and all of that and, but it doesn't seem like 25 years ago, but it obviously is.

Q. To sort of do a full arc, and I apologize if this has been revealed more than I know, but the end of your career, how much, where are you at in terms of how you would like to exit, not that I'm trying to push you out or anything.

COACH STEVE FISHER: Well, I didn't come here to talk about getting fired.

(Laughter.)

I got fired. And I thought that I -- I said this -- I thought I would stay there until now. Until I wanted to quit. And I thought, well, I'm just going to have to decide which building I want named after me. And it didn't happen that way.

Things happen. And you move on. All of the emotions that anybody that he's ever been fired from any job know how I felt, from a high profile job too. But sometimes things happen and a better thing is waiting on your doorstep. I didn't know that, but the experience and the opportunity we have had at San Diego State is unbelievable. I wouldn't trade it for anything.

We love where we are. My older boy's on staff, my younger son had the ability to go to USC Film School because of the fact that we moved to Southern California. So -- and I'm always a guy that the glass is half filled. I'm always going to make the best of the situation.

So John Beilein, the current coach, I like him a lot. He is a terrific coach. And I talked to him several times over the course of the past year or so. So I know what happened, I know where I've been, and I love where I am.

Q. Your future at San Diego State, have you thought about when that time will happen when you'll walk away and does it matter how you do in a tournament? Is it possible that win or lose a certain way, that would you say, now's the time?

COACH STEVE FISHER: No, I'm not going to, I don't think, do what Al McGuire or John Wooden did their last year. I plan on being back next year. I got one more year left on a contract. And after that, we'll just see what happens at the end of the following year. We'll see how it goes. The one thing that I'm really pleased about is Brian Dutcher whose been with me forever, has been named the next head coach. And I promised him it wouldn't be as long as Boeheim's assistants had to wait before he takes over.

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THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you, coach.

COACH STEVE FISHER: Thank you.
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