

**March 22, 2014**



San Diego State – 63  
North Dakota State – 44

An interview with:

THE MODERATOR: We'll go ahead and get started with an opening statement from coach and then take questions for the student-athletes.

COACH STEVE FISHER: Needless to say, we as a group collectively, are immensely excited that we're playing. That we will be playing next week.

We have talked about why you go to a place as a basketball player with an opportunity to do what we're doing now. And the nice thing about our group is they listen and they buy into we can be special, we can be better than expected, we can accomplish things that have never been accomplished. So, that's been our theme. We have been quiet about it and we still want to be quiet about it, but we're not surprised that we're still playing. Some people might be and some people might say well, you know, they got lucky, whatever, whatever. We're not surprised. We think we're good enough to play with anybody.

X will get a lot of the accolades. He's been special and fantastic, but we have a team. Josh was a guy, when he chose to come to San Diego State, we as a staff, said the missing piece to our team. And he has provided that for us. He had 13 rebounds tonight, he's so, so, so dynamic as to how he goes after balls and that wins.

Polee, who did not play in some games, and it wasn't injury, he didn't play in the Arizona

game. And he's our sixth starter. He's done things to maintain a balance and a readiness that shows in the locker room. And I use them as an example. Be ready, Dwayne has always had a smile on his face and played for the team. And that's why we're winning, because we got a team. And we're all excited to now be moving on to the Sweet 16.

THE MODERATOR: Take questions for the student-athletes.

**Q. X, I don't know if you were motivated, but how motivated were you tonight after that turnover that allowed New Mexico State to tie it going into overtime?**

XAVIER THAMES: I was pretty motivated. I'm motivated for each and every game. I'm always ready to play. It was a big game for us to get to the Sweet 16. So, it was a good team win for us, we came out and played good defense on a great offensive team, so I'm just glad we got the win.

**Q. Josh, you held North Dakota State, led the country in field goal percentage, you held them to 32 percent. What's are reaction to that?**

JOSH DAVIS: That was just a great team effort. Everybody stuck to their assignment, but we have been working hard, preparing for it. So, I'm just glad we were able to stick to what we planned on doing.

**Q. Xavier, can you explain how you attacked their defense and what they were throwing at you. Talk about that a little bit?**

XAVIER THAMES: Well we used the high ball screen a lot. DP set a few ball screens, Josh set a lot of them. And Skylar set a lot. So, I got to give credit to those guys, because I was getting to the lane kind of easy making my shots, so that was just the game plan, just to get into the lane, try to find people or make a shot for myself. But without them, I wouldn't be able to do those things.

**Q. Their leading scorer was 2-14. Was he an emphasis for you guys tonight is this?**

WAYNE POLEE II: Yeah he was definitely an emphasis that was the Player of the Year in their conference averaging 18 points, so we really made an emphasis to kind of cut his water off and I think it was a team effort and we did just that.

**Q. You got to see the last team to go to the Sweet 16 and I just wonder what you think of this team and the way you guys play as a team and just how maybe you'll handle it differently or better.**

XAVIER THAMES: I know all the guys will be ready. It's a blessing to get back to the Sweet 16. And also to play in Anaheim with a group of guys that I love playing with. They're all my brothers, so I'm just happy we got the win tonight and we're going to the Sweet 16. So like I said, it's just a blessing.

**Q. Follow-up on that, maybe X and maybe DP you could talk about it too, Anaheim's an arena that you're very familiar with, you know you'll have fans there. When you saw the draw and you saw that had you a chance to play in Anaheim, was it kind of in the back of your mind if we get there something special will happen I want?**

WAYNE POLEE II: Our fans are great at traveling and giving us great energy. So I think we'll have a very good attendance of fans and our families will be there, so we're going to have a great crowd and we're going to feed off of it and go out there and play our hearts out.

XAVIER THAMES: We know when we saw the Selection Sunday we saw our name called, we knew we were going to Spokane and everybody had it in the back of their mind that if we win two games we're going to be playing in Anaheim. But we wanted to come out and win the first game and then win the second game like coach said, it was a two game tournament and we wanted to get two wins and that's what we did.

**Q. The 7-0 run late in the first half put you guys up and you maintained the lead. How important is that against an underdog like North Dakota State to keep keeping the lead?**

XAVIER THAMES: It was very important. We had the lead last game against New Mexico State and we kind of came out flat in the second half. So I just reminded the guys before the

second half started we can't come out flat again like we did against New Mexico State. And I think we did that for the most part.

**Q. Were you feeling it more than usual or is this somewhat typical?**

XAVIER THAMES: I felt pretty good going into the game. I know it was a big game. So it wasn't just me, it was my teammates getting me open, us playing team defense, but I did feel pretty good coming into the game, but without my teammates I wouldn't have had the game I had.

**Q. Does this, after last year with Florida Gulf Coast, does this makeup for it? Does this erase that memory of what happened against them?**

XAVIER THAMES: A little bit, but not really. We're just, we just wanted to come out and get a win, no matter who our opponent was, we're just happen post-season a blessed and to be going back to the Sweet 16 and going to Anaheim in California with all of our fans and coming out to support us. So we want to go out there and have fun and play hard each and every game.

**Q. Josh, North Dakota State hadn't seen a defense like you guys played just the intensity and how good you were. Was this a typical defensive game or was this a really, really good defensive game even for a good defensive team?**

JOSH DAVIS: I think it was a typical defensive game. Credit Skylar Spencer because he played really good defense on 42. So I just think it was a great team effort.

**Q. For Josh and Dwayne, the thought of going to the Sweet 16, how excited are you guys at this point?**

WAYNE POLEE II: The Sweet 16 is something that most teams don't get to go to and most players will never experience. So we're blessed to be in the position, we're excited and I know our coaching staff is going to have us very prepared.

JOSH DAVIS: I'm just blessed to have this opportunity. This is my first time in the tournament, so to go to the Sweet 16 and this being my first year in the tournament is beautiful.

THE MODERATOR: All right. We'll excuse you to the locker room and take questions

for coach.

**Q. For those of us who aren't familiar, can you give us the Cliff Notes version of Xavier transferring from Washington State, how you got the call?**

COACH STEVE FISHER: This is a funny business we're in, and you never know what's around the next corner. We recruited X. We recruited Xavier while we were recruiting Chase Tapley. Chase chose to come to San Diego State. I thought we were going to get X also. They're good buddies and I was very disappointed when he chose Washington State.

But we wished him luck. His family got to know us as people. I think that was helpful from our end. When I got the call, I vividly remember I'm in Detroit or Ontario across the river when the Final Four was played in Detroit. And I got a call saying that Xavier Thames had his release and he, they wanted to talk to us. And after I talked to them, they said we want to come. I didn't have to recruit him, he said he wanted to come.

We have taken transfers, but we have taken good transfers who are good people. We have been selective. We have taken transfers, many of whom we knew, because we had recruited them in the past and X was another one of those. We knew what we were getting in terms of the person. He's developed his game to where he is light years better than he was when he came to us. And that's on X.

I said this, he did more to improve himself in that red shirt season than any red shirt I've ever had. And when D.J. Gay left in that 10-11 season I said what are we going to do for a point guard, we don't have D.J. And X heard people say that. He knew he would be ready and he has delivered and then some. So very happy for him and obviously happy for us.

**Q. You mentioned right from the start when you found out what bracket you were going to be in that going to Anaheim and how great that would be to get the two wins. Talk about the advantage of playing that close.**

COACH STEVE FISHER: You fight all regular season, one, you set a goal, most of us do, we want to win a conference championship. And we did that in a really good league. A hard fought conference championship. We went 16-2. Which I thought no way will anybody go 16-2.

And we beat a New Mexico team and I'm not, I feel badly that we're both not still playing.

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They're really, really, really good. So we went through some battles and some wars to get where we are. As a result of that, we got a four seed. So we have been in tournaments before where we have been in double digit seeds and even when we were a six or a seven, whatever we were, we got shipped three time zones away. It was as if they wanted to say, who can we move the furthest, we were that team that moved the furthest. So, now as a four seed you feel like you're going to be protected in your own area. We earned that, so we expected after we won the conference that we -- we thought we would have a really good chance to stay in the West. And we knew Anaheim was the next round. So, it was huge doing what we did in the regular season, to earn that four seed to now have the opportunity to play where we don't have to worry about airplanes. We get on a bus and we drive an hour and a half or whatever it is to a building we played in before. So it's great for us.

**Q. I won't follow-up on not having to get on airplanes.**

COACH STEVE FISHER: Thank you.

**Q. Can you talk about the job you and your staff did in a short turn around. You really seemed to have those guys completely dialed in. You knew everything they were going to do and you just took the nation's leader or one of the best teams in field goal percentage and held them to 32 percent.**

COACH STEVE FISHER: Not to brag, but and I'll exclude myself, we have as good a coaching staff as there is in the country. A group that doesn't care who gets credit. We got a wonderful group of guys and we worked hard all of us. We divvied it up, two guys had one team, two guys had the other and the Oklahoma North Dakota State game, but once we found out it was North Dakota State, we all took games and watched. I watched. We all did.

We team taught. We said, okay, what do we need to do? Then I think it's nice that you've got some guys that have been in the business for awhile like Dutch and myself. We call people. We look to who have they played, who can we call. And I called Tim Miles, who coached at North Dakota State. And you know what he told me? He said, Steve, I love you like a big brother, but I can't tell you one thing about North Dakota State. And I said, I would have been disappointed had you. But

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he congratulated us for being here, wished us luck, we did the same for thing. But we asked people that we called that we knew that talked to us. So we were on the phones. A lot of the things were the same. So we said these are absolutes. These are people that know them, that have played them, that are saying do this, don't do that, make sure this happens. I think that helped us. Then you can't overload, certainly in a short turn around and I told the kids, I said you're seeing one-onethousandth of what we have watched as we show you tape.

Josh says 42, I don't know if you pronounce it Bjorklund, don't pronounce the J? But 42 was a key for us. Don't let him get by you.

And then Braun, he's big time good. Don't let him get through you and around you. Make them go over you to shoot balls.

That was the theme. Our kids knew how good this team was. This is a good team. This is a team and I said this before, if you play in the gym shirts and skins, they could be any team in the country. I know they could be Wisconsin, because that's where Saul came from. They look like Wisconsin and they play a little bit like them. Somebody asked me before who did they remind you of, we didn't play Wisconsin, but they probably remind you of Wisconsin. They're good, they're physical, they're tough and they win. They're veterans. We worked hard to scout them. They did the same for us, I'm sure of that. The one thing too, that you asked, somebody asked, I think when you're playing with a lead it's really, really helpful. Even with a small lead. I watched this team play when they had leads, boy, they played with confidence. When you have a lead and the other team's always fighting to catch you, that wears on you a little bit.

**Q. You touched on it, but a very emotional group of North Dakota State players came in before you guys and I know you had a chance to talk to Coach Phillips before the game. What do you see for him and then the program moving forward as a team that kind of tries to build it itself as a team that will be a contender, a Mid Major contender every year from here on out?**

COACH STEVE FISHER: When you do what they have done, and you get to the tournament and you win in the tournament, that gets everybody's attention. Recruiting is the name of the game. And that will open doors, maybe that weren't there for them before, to get in the door of

other players that will now help their program grow and continue to get where they want to go.

I told Saul before the game, I said, you've done a really, really terrific job with this team. And I know you know that and I know you don't want to say, yeah, I have, but you have. I have a great appreciation for how he's doing the job, what he's doing and with whom he's doing it. I think they will continue to be very successful. And this experience will obviously help them.

When you're a senior and they have got a lot of really good ones, it hurts when you know you can't be there. But, the nice thing about that too, they will come back and tell the new group and the guys returning, you can do what we did. And then do it and do it better. So it hurts, it does. If it doesn't hurt, then you're not going to be here. So, but, they have a really good program and that's what we talk about, having a good program. They got a good program.

**Q. The team in 2011 was supposed to go to Anaheim. You were the number two. You had a great team. This team was picked fourth, I think, in the preseason. How has this journey been different or what's the emotion of that?**

COACH STEVE FISHER: It really has been different. There were expectations, probably loftier than they needed to be with the team, the 34-3 team. We won 20 in a row and went on and on and it snowballed. We got a jump start right here in Spokane when we came up and beat Gonzaga in their building. And beat them. We played better than they did.

And then that's when our players said, hey, we're good. But people thought and expected us to get where we were.

I agonized with our team, we were good enough that year to win the National Championship. Connecticut beat us. I thought we were better than Connecticut. Sometimes you got to get a little bit lucky, we had two technical fouls called on us in that game and it impacted the flow of the game. But we were good enough to win a National Championship.

To say that five years ago people would laugh at you. But after that experience, we wanted it again. But this year nobody thought we would be what we are, so it was almost like a hall pass. Well, we no longer say a rebuilding year, but they said a bridge year. Nice way of saying a rebuilding year. And wait until next year.

Well, we were, we knew we would be good and I said before, when Josh came, I really felt he could be a huge piece to what we didn't have and really needed. And then we played and won and won some close games, went to Anaheim. So I don't think there was pressures of expectations, which was good for us, it really was. Harder when you're supposed to win. Then when you win a close game people say, what's the matter? This year when we won a close game, didn't matter who we played they were patting us on the back and telling us how good we were.

So it helped us. It really did help us.

**Q. With that short run right before halftime what did you say to your guys to make sure that you kept that lead and kept the underdog quiet?**

COACH STEVE FISHER: We talk all the time about how we start the second half and we got a bit of a theme. When you get, score the first basket, get the first basket of the second half. Win the first four minute segment. We talked about it in New Mexico State and they came out and hit us first.

I didn't get into that. X said he did and said something to them, but you've got to compete for 40 minutes. And we have been a team that's done that for the most part. We have not had a lot of lulls during games. And that allows you to have a chance to be good and we're good.

THE MODERATOR: All right. Thank you.

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