



**2013 America East Men's & Women's Basketball Championship Presented SEFCU
Men's Quarterfinal #2: #6 UMBC 69, #3 Hartford 62**

UMBC Head coach Aki Thomas' opening statement:

I'll start by saying that this is a huge win for our basketball program. It's been a while since we've gotten a win in the conference tournament, I think since 2009, and it was here, it was actually here, and it's kind of strange, but we get to relive it four years later. I'm very proud and happy for our seniors who stepped up tonight and did a hell of a job. It was a team effort, guys really battled, we just didn't want to go away. We were scrappy defensively, we got the stops that we needed and it's a good win for our program.

UMBC guard Brian Neller on his offensive performance:

My teammates gave me a lot of confidence today because they got a lot of open shots. That drive to the basket [late in the 4th quarter] was when the guy was closing out on me real hard and I took it to the basket and finished.

UMBC guard Ryan Cook on potentially being his last game:

From the minute we started warming up, in my head I was like 'this can't be my last game,' so I just tried to get everyone all pumped up and realize that this is not going to be our last game either.

Cook on starting his career as a division II walk-on:

Really it was just a lot of hope and hard work. I went into an athletic open house and they were just like 'alright, we'll give you a shot, you can try out,' so they gave me a chance to play. I thought I was doing good so, I just wanted to come home and I ended up coming to UMBC where coach Aki and coach Zitto gave me a chance to play. *[On not getting recruited out of high school]* I just didn't get any scouting looks, so yeah, I thought I was good.

Cook on getting this win for Coach Thomas:

Oh yeah, he's been there a lot for us, even throughout the two years, three years. He's just a great guy, so getting this win for him is just great.

Coach Thomas on how big this win was considering the unknown future status:

"It's never really been too much about me, it's always been about the players and I always knew I was going to be okay. It's always been for them – they're the one that have been doing three tough seasons and when Neller

hits that shot, I'm thinking about a lot of things. I'm thinking about 'does he hit that shot a couple years ago, or do he have the confidence to take that shot.'"

Coach Thomas on what makes him think they can do it again tomorrow:

Well we did it today. I like the momentum that our team has. I like the bond that our team has right now. They're very confident in one another, very confident in themselves. And they're confident in me. We really come together as a family, and I *can't wait* to tip the ball off tomorrow.

Hartford Coach John Gallagher's opening statement:

First of all I want to give tremendous credit to UMBC and coach [Aki] Thomas. When you are in the situation when you are building your program like we are it's not always going to go to script, so I want to congratulate the two seniors on their game. [Ryan] Cook with 24 points and [Brian] Neller with 20. You have to give those guys a credit, lot of energy, lot of hard work. They shot 79% in the second half and that's the storyline. But for us to grow as a program we first have to give credit to the other team. We didn't get the stops we needed, but it was a lot on them. This is a step to the right direction, not the end that we wanted, but I am proud of our season and I am proud of the guys for the effort they gave me all year.

Hartford's Nate Sikma on UMBC's huge lead at the beginning of the second half:

With Neller we messed up our rotations and then [Ryan] Cook just played a great game, he was aggressive all night and had some tough shots so I think defensively in the second half that was obviously not our best effort.

Hartford's Mark Nwakamma on the great UMBC's second half:

We lost [Brian] Neller and he had some open shots, and those first 10 shots in the second half happened because of our lack of urgency on defense, we didn't communicate on the switches. [Ryan] Cook was just fantastic; it was a tough match up against him.

Nate Sikma and Mark Nwakamma on the overall season:

Nate: I think this is the step in the right direction, I think it's something we can build on. Hopefully we can take this loss and work even harder this post season and be where we want to be next season. **Mark:** I feel like we did make history as a team, it's a testament to our hard work. It didn't end as we wanted it to but it is a step and we have to look forward. This was a learning experience for me.

Coach Gallagher's closing statement:

They had two or three straight possessions, but if you look at the numbers you can say how is this even a game, I am being honest, they made some tough shots, we had some breakdowns on our defense. What frustrates me, I have to find a way to keep my best player, Mark [Nwakamma] on the floor. That's it. I was proud how we fought until the end. A lot of times, people will say what we didn't do, and we didn't do a lot, but UMBC did a lot and they deserve a lot of credit. But they have two seniors leaving, which is losing 44 points right there. We only have one guy. We are young so I am not worried, we are going to look forward and hopefully we will get invited to a post season tournament and get ready for the next season.