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An Interview With:
SMU
Hartford, Connecticut
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MODERATOR: Ladies and gentlemen, we welcome from SMU Mustangs Head Coach Larry Brown, Cannen Cunningham, Yanick Moreira and Ryan Manuel. This will be their first NCAA Tournament appearance since 1993 with the American Athletic Conference championship. It's their first conference championship since 1998. Coach, an opening statement?

COACH BROWN: Yeah, I just want to admire what Connecticut was able to do, after we got such a big lead and the character they showed to come back. It's never easy playing against Kevin, and it's amazing when you play in an atmosphere like this and you realize the tradition they have and you understand why.

About my team, I don't know if any team had to go on a home court to win a conference tournament. I'm so proud of them. These seniors have been amazing. Matt Doherty should be up here with me because he left me with an unbelievable group of guys. And I celebrate with him. And the greatest thing is we don't have to worry about anybody letting us know whether we're worthy of going or not. Sunday last year at this time was about as disappointing as it could get based on the body of work that these kids did, but fortunately we've got another opportunity and didn't have to get anybody to decide whether we're worthy or not. I'm proud of all these guys for that.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach. Just a couple questions for the players. SMU will make them available but we want to get them out to watch the show.

Q. Can you guys talk about briefly what it means to each of you to come away with that win at the end of the season and going into the NCAAs with momentum?

RYAN MANUEL: This is big for all of us, not just the seniors but it's as big for SMU as a school, as a basketball program. You know, when Coach Brown got here, he wanted us to put it back on the map and I think we made great strides in that. Although we not going to be here next year, I think it's setting a stepping stone for what SMU can be for years to come.

Q. Ryan, if you could just talk about what this means to the school? First NCAA appearance since 1993 especially after what happened last year?

RYAN MANUEL: Means a lot. Like I just said, you know, put in this hard work and like Coach Brown said, we don't want to leave it in anybody's hands and we don't want to depend on anybody, it's up to us and the coaches. For us to come out here and get a victory at UConn it just speaks to what we've done this whole year going through adversity and once again we prevail.

Q. How much more difficult was it for you guys in the second half with Ryan out there for UConn?

RYAN MANUEL: I mean, he's a shot blocker, so it made it a little difficult, but every team makes their runs, and UConn, they have a tradition of coming back and we knew they weren't going to go down without a fight, so just for us to stand there all of us as a team and to get the win, it speaks to the maturity of our team.

Q. Despite the momentum that this crowd was giving UConn earlier, you guys still maintained your composure. How do you take that poise that you had in today's game moving into the tournament?

CANNEN CUNNINGHAM: I think it's big. The Coach mentioned that nobody else in the country probably had to play a road game for their conference championship, but we only have neutral games ahead of us. Our fans travel well

and we appreciate that. It was a good test and I think we passed today going against this crowd because they really carry that team.

Q. Can you just talk about what you guys did down low, especially in the first half, you got them into foul trouble early and you kind of dominated in the paint?

YANICK MOREIRA: We just trying to get the ball to the post and trying to find open shooters. We knew they was going to double the post so we was just trying to find a teammate.

MODERATOR: All right, gentlemen. Go find out where you're playing next. Questions for coach.

Q. The same question, Kennedy, early especially in the first half, you got their bigs in foul trouble really early and Kennedy kind of dominated. Was that the strategy going in to try to take it right at their big men?

COACH BROWN: That's how we play. Nic Moore didn't shoot the ball very well this whole tournament. Obviously when you're the Player of the Year, a lot of people kind of focus on you, but we have four big people that we feel can contribute. They all can catch, they all can pass, they're all post presence, and we tried very hard to get it -- you get it down low, you get a chance to get a second shot or get fouled but really keep them out of transition. We didn't do a good job second half doing that, we got a little anxious. Ryan did a marvelous job. I know they had the defensive Player of the Year but there's no way you can have -- you ought to have a separate one for a perimeter guy and a post guy because, you know, the young big kid is phenomenal, his effort's great, he just protects everybody, and I don't take anything away from him. He changed the whole game the second half. But when you look at this league and you look at all the wonderful point guards and two guards in this league, you've got to have a big-time defender in the backcourt and I don't know of anyone any better than Ryan, I don't know of any better player, perimeter player than Boatright, and we did a wonderful job on him. I thought that was the key.

Q. Larry, can you talk about just what you touched on earlier about kind of what this means to you a year later after what went down last year and then this year's completely different?

COACH BROWN: Well, I mean, the validation of last year was Connecticut winning the National Championship being an 8 seed, watching Louisville and Cincinnati, and I think Memphis got in, I'm not sure, I don't know. I was proud of our conference. We almost, you know, won everything. The women won, the men won, I think Rutgers won the NIT. We were an out-of-bounds call away from winning the NIT, and we got great experience playing in the NIT. I didn't say anything last year, but that, to me, when I saw Louisville the 4th seed. So I told the kids all year, we don't need to let anybody determine our fate. Reminded me when Coach Smith was down 1 against Georgetown, he told everybody we were exactly where we wanted to be, we had Michael and we had a chance to win it. But to come in here and win on the road against such a courageous team because Connecticut, they had to win some unbelievable games to put themselves in this position. I have so much admiration for them, but I'm hopeful our guys are enjoying this moment because it doesn't -- it just doesn't always happen.

Q. Last year Louisville was a 4 seed, Connecticut was a 7, of course you guys were omitted from the field. Are you concerned this year about the perception of the conference when it comes to seeding now that you do have your bid?

COACH BROWN: My hope is Connecticut, Tulsa, Temple get in. My hope is that they realize this is a quality conference. I hope like crazy that they get a chance to defend the championship. But I don't know, that's out of my hands. I can just tell you from a personal standpoint every game we play in this conference to me is against a quality program with a great coach. And to come out on top is very exciting, but I'm hopeful, I don't want people to go through what we went through.

Q. Larry, I asked Nic the other day about your superstitions and he said he didn't know anything about it. Do you try to keep that away from the players, is that just with the assistant coaches? Is that tie safe, is that going to the NCAA Tournament? Do you have a bus driver picked out yet?

COACH BROWN: Well, our bus driver's the guy that we got beat against Connecticut last time we were here but we forgot to tip him, so we

decided to bring him back. Yeah, ties are important. This thing's important more so than anything. I don't share that, they think I'm crazy enough as it is, I don't want to get them to have any ammunition to prove that point.

Q. Coach Brown, congratulations. I had a chance to work with Brown and Moore with the Global Sports Academy this past summer, really enjoyed them and their personalities and we obviously share some contacts. I saw earlier in the game you made a few gestures, a few pounds to Nic Moore, you grabbed him by the cheeks and just encouraged him. I'm just curious if you could say a few things about the importance of building relationships with the kids you coach?

COACH BROWN: Well, again, Matt had a lot to do, a lot of people we have and my staff, but my coach was all about the kids. Sometimes I do some things I'm not really proud of, but I think they know I care. Nic's had a hard time with me, it's been a real difficult adjustment. He played for Tim and then all of a sudden now I become the head coach and things I'm asking him to do are sometimes, they might take away what he's capable of doing but it's necessary for our club. But my coach was direct and honest with me and I think I was able to take it because I knew how much he cared. I hope my players understand that.

Q. Earlier this weekend you talked about your relationship with Jeff Lebo. Obviously you have a relationship with Kevin Ollie as well. Can you discuss your feelings for him and do you see some of your coaching when you watch what UConn does?

COACH BROWN: I mean, anybody that's ever been around him would send their son to play for him. He's all about what our profession should be. It's all about teaching these kids to grow up and be responsible young men, which is not easy based on how a lot of them are brought up with people hesitating to tell them what they need to be told, people reluctant to coach them, people to talk about things outside of basketball that they're going to value for the rest of their lives and that's what he's about.

I have no fun coaching against him or Jeff, but last year was one of the neatest experiences of my life, watching the NCAA championship and knowing it couldn't have been a more deserving

program or a more deserving kid. Like Coach talked about a tree, I've got a forest right now, and the forest right now is because of him, so I celebrate when I see things like that happen to players that have meant a lot to me.

MODERATOR: Thanks, Coach. Good luck.

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