



# 2018 Big West Men's Basketball Tournament

## Presented by MemorialCare

### Game 7 - Quarterfinal Quotes

#### Final - No. 3 UC Irvine def. No. 6 Hawai'i, 68-67



### **No. 3 UC Irvine**

#### **Head Coach Russell Turner -**

*(Opening statement)* "You all got to see a great college basketball game. I feel like, credit to Hawaii and the players on their team, especially their senior big guys: Gibson Johnson and Mike Thomas. I thought those two guys were incredible in their performance tonight, and the level that Hawaii played at was difficult for us to match. I'm sorry for them that they were not able to win that game, but I'm sure happy we were able to win it. I'm pleased with my teams' poise and execution down the stretch, both offensively and defensively. I feel like some of the experiences we've had together this year helped us tonight. Credit to my guys for believing throughout the game that we can win, and making the plays to win. Proud of these two [Eyassu Worku and Even Leonard] guys here."

*(On game-winning shot)* "In that situation we had a small team on the floor, with a First-Team All-Conference guy, Tommy Rutherford in the middle of the court and four players around him, all that can drive and stretch the court. Eyassu made the right play, by going aggressively. --- came into the paint and tried to draw a charge and made the right read. Max was prepared in that moment, and they had a tough dilemma about how to play. Well executed. I told the team that we would not worry about who got that shot. We would read the defense and make the right play and the balance of this team is one of our strengths. That's the first time we've been in that situation and converted."

*(On closing the gap)* "I was impressed with the level that Hawaii played offensively, to execute, get good shots against us. That was the reason why they built the lead, and then maintained it. I think they played at such a high level that they were probably tired at the end of the game, and I think it might have affected them when we had a small team on the floor that was athletic, quick, challenging them. They were in the same position we were in last Saturday, trying to withstand a run, and sometimes there's a little bit of a letup when that happens. But our guys made smart, tough plays to win the ball back. What helped is that we made our free throws down the stretch. There were plenty of ways we could have allowed that game to slip away, but we refused to do that, and that's pretty good if you're an Irvine fan or an Irvine coach."

#### **Sophomore Guard Evan Leonard -**

*(On big plays)* "Definitely going to be that last second shot. The defensive plays we were able to make down the stretch were key for this win today."

#### **Sophomore Guard Eyassu Worku -**

*(On ball pressure)* "We are a defensive team, as you know. We wanted to pressure them up because we were down, and we just made key stops at the end. We were just trapping them. Luckily we got those stops. Then we made plays on the other end, but it all comes down to our defense at the end of the day."

*(On making big plays)* "I think the last shot was definitely something I thought of, because last week we played Davis and we had the same opportunity, and it didn't go our way. Those defensive stops are something we think about and something we rely on every game, and those are the plays I remember the most from this past game."

*(On poise and youth of team that sparked the comeback)* "Definitely the non-conference schedule helped us out. We went through many troubles, but we've been in those positions, and as you can tell we're a young team, but we call ourselves veterans. We've been through a lot together. We've gained bonds. It starts with our captions and goes all the way down to the last guy on the bench. We're always poised, honestly."

### **No. 6 Hawai'i**

#### **Head Coach Eran Ganot -**

*(Opening statement)* "Tough one, tough finish. Really proud of our guys. I thought our effort, our heart was tremendous on that run. I think there was a little bit of a microcosm of our season, but it's not about that right now. Just thought we battled but we had some lapses in a two-minute stretch. I cannot say enough about our senior class, about this group, the toughness and the heartache gets you in the moment and I always talk about perspective which is so important. Without these guys, we were dealt a haymaker as a program and there have been teams who have gone through the things we've gone through. They got us back and got us back quick. I know it's year three for us it's kind of year two in terms of dealing with those situations. To go close to .500 in year one then 17 wins this year and control the game against, you could argue a gold standard in our league the last several years, to have a tough two minute stretch is tough but we have a great future, that's where perspective comes in. These guys didn't let us fall off a cliff, kept us more than relevant, each of the last two years. When other programs go through this it doesn't happen like that, let alone that quick. If anyone doesn't realize that or appreciate that you're crazy, I can't sing their praises enough, all the guys in locker room but particularly this class who's had to deal with a lot. These guys are studs and I can't thank them enough."

#### **Senior Forward Mike Thomas -**

*(On describing the emotions after game)* "We lost by one point. Personally I'm a little heartbroken, I feel like I let the team down a little bit. But I'm proud of the way we played tonight. We proved we're better than the sixth seed, it's just tough."

#### **Senior Forward Gibson Johnson -**

*(On when the game turned down the stretch)* "A couple crucial turnovers. Their guards, they did a great job taking the ball to the hoop and getting fouled. I thought we fought hard and unfortunately just didn't come out on top."