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# THE UTAH STATESMAN

MENTAL HEALTH SPECIAL EDITION

Week of March 19, 2019  
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## Mountain West Champs

*Tournament recap inside*

## Stop the Stigma.

*Let's talk about mental health.*

# 22.8%

of adults between 18 and 24 living in Utah have experienced depression.\*

\*According to a study by the National Institute of Mental Health from 2015-2017. They define depression as having symptoms that interfere with a person's ability to work, sleep, study, eat, and enjoy life.



# False alarm code blue triggers Aggies with PTSD

By Spencer Burt  
NEWS STAFF WRITER

For someone who has been through trauma, even false alarms can be triggering.

A few weeks ago when Utah State University’s Code Blue system sent out a warning of an “armed aggressor” on campus, Sierra Wise was in the printmaking studio with other art students. Her fight-or-flight instincts were to make sure everyone hid underneath the tables while their professor locked the door and some students covered the windows.

About five to 10 minutes later, an “all clear” message was sent out on the system, telling students, faculty and staff that the alert was an error. Although it was a false alarm, those several minutes of uncertainty sparked symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder in Wise, the USU Student Association senator for the arts college and a firsthand witness of gun violence.

About four years ago, she was serving as a missionary in Guatemala for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when she found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. She and her mission companion were talking to some women outside their family’s home in broad daylight when a Jeep with blacked out windows drove toward them with armed men inside. “Then all of a sudden we heard like these loud noises behind us,” Wise said. “They had sawed-off shotguns and were shooting at the women who we were speaking to, but we were in the line of fire.”

They ran with the women into the house and hid under a bed as family members barricaded the door. One man was shot in the arm, but nobody else was injured. Police were nearby and chased the shooters down the street before they could do more damage.

The missionaries immediately ran out the door and got as far away from the area as possible. Wise said the men who shot at them were likely seeking drug money the family owed them. While they were not the intended target of the shooting and escaped physically unharmed, the ordeal left psychological scars.

It wasn’t until she returned home that Wise realized she had post-traumatic stress disorder — that this was more than just a “crazy mission story.” She found herself uncomfortable around firearms, strongly disliking loud noises, and dealing with the uncertainty that someone, anyone, could have a weapon on them that could be a threat to her safety.

Wise was diagnosed with PTSD by a psychiatrist, then met with a therapist to work through the symptoms.

One major part of this, Wise said, was acceptance — accepting that everyone experiences trauma to some

“*Why do I have PTSD? What did I do wrong, either in this situation or after*”

— Sierra Wise, USUSA Caine College of the Arts Senator

degree in their life, but not everyone experiences post-traumatic stress, and for those who do, it is not their fault.

“That was hard for me to cope with,” Wise said.

She would ask herself, “Why do I have PTSD? What did I do wrong, either in this original situation or afterwards?”

With the help of a mental health professional though, she said she’s been able to work through it and realize that there is no right or wrong way to deal with trauma. “It’s incredibly affirming to have someone coach you through that and talk you through that and to recognize ... this isn’t my fault,” she said.

But on Feb. 20, the Code Blue alert brought back similar feelings.

“Hiding under a table with a crying classmate felt very reminiscent to hiding under a bed with a crying companion,” Wise said.

After finding out the alert was a mistake, she called her therapist right away to make an appointment.

“I anticipated that I was going to have PTSD symptoms, and I definitely did,” she said. Symptoms she had previously worked through in therapy resurfaced, and she had nightmares for about a week after the false alarm. But therapy again gave her someone to talk through the trauma.

Wise emphasized her appreciation to how the university handled the aftermath, particularly the listening session hosted the next day when university administration and police gave a more detailed explanation and gave students and employees the chance to speak their concerns.

“The experience was definitely unfortunate, but it wasn’t tragic because it was a false alarm,” she said. “But my heart goes out to all the people who have been in situations like that that weren’t false alarms.”

She said she also recognizes that her experience is different than many other trauma survivors.

Having witnessed gun violence and fearing for her life, while still traumatic, she considered herself “privileged” compared to victims of personal violence.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, PTSD usually comes after a “shocking, scary, or dangerous” experience, such as assault, abuse, car accidents, war, disasters, or the loss of a loved one. It can come at any time or any age, shortly after the experience or years later. While a single event or experience can be traumatic, so can prolonged exposure to traumatic things — even witnessing them secondhand.

USU journalism and communication Professor Matthew LaPlante talks openly with his classes about his PTSD.

As a newspaper reporter, he has covered traumatic things like the Iraq War, gang warfare in El Salvador and tribal infanticide in Ethiopia. He has also interviewed and written about the families of fallen soldiers, which he said was just as traumatizing if not more.

Rather than one particular experience, LaPlante said his PTSD came from many of these experiences over time. Even while writing about others’ post-traumatic stress — including war veterans and their families — he said he didn’t realize that he was also experiencing it.

“I was constantly being triggered, but I didn’t know that was what was happening,” he said of the time when he sought

help about 10 years ago. July has sometimes been hard for him, he said, as the sound of whistling and exploding fireworks would sometimes trigger him.

Recently, he said, an unexpected sneeze from his wife can even do it.

LaPlante was teaching a class when the “armed aggressor” Code Blue alert was sent out. “For me, it was amazing how completely normal it felt,” he said. “It could have been triggering ... you never know with those things.”

The National Institute of Mental Health lists criteria for a PTSD diagnosis, including multiple of these symptoms: Flashbacks, Bad dreams, Frightening thoughts, Avoiding certain places, people, thoughts or objects related to a traumatic event, being easily startled, feeling tense, trouble remembering things about the traumatic event, feeling guilt or blame.

Wise added that if someone tells a trusted family member or friend that they have PTSD, it would not usually be appropriate to follow up by asking what happened. “If that person wants you to know what happened, they’ll tell you,” she said. Instead, she suggested that one could ask questions like “Do you want to talk about it?” or if there is anything that could either help or make it worse.

“You don’t always have to know the story behind why someone has a post-traumatic response,” she said.

*Editor’s note: The author is currently one of LaPlante’s students and was in his class at the time of the Code Blue alerts.*

— [spencerburt@aggiemail.usu.edu](mailto:spencerburt@aggiemail.usu.edu)  
@SpencerABurt

# The evolution of USU’s Mental Health Week



PHOTO BY Megan Nielsen  
Rachael Fresh speaks at the Stand Up To Suicide March on Mar. 24, 2018. This event was part of Mental Health Week on Utah State University’s campus.

By Michaella Whitney  
NEWS STAFF WRITER

Mental health week originated through individuals at Utah State who worked together to promote awareness and resources due to the crisis they saw on campus. It got off to a slow start in 2014 only to grow to a fully endorsed event by the administrators and student body of Utah State University.

Ty Aller, a licensed family and marriage therapist and graduate student, was the USUSA graduate director under the Graduate Studies Senator at the time he thought of mental health week. He and a couple others had an “in” to student involvement and worked through the graduate studies senator to promote resources for mental health and address the growing need at the university.

“When we first started, it wasn’t outwardly ostracized, it wasn’t outwardly no you can’t do this, but we couldn’t get people to talk to us about it. Like the people with money, the administrators, people you needed to get on board. It was hard,” Aller said.

Aller’s next steps were to show the university through their own efforts that this needed to happen and people needed to know about it.

“So the first week we did was a rag-tag thing. We had workshops with graduate psychology students that were self help type things, we had a mental health fair where we invited a lot of people from the community in health services to come and talk with students in the sunburst lounges. We had motivational speakers come which had a great outcome.” Aller said.

The following year only lead to more funding and more promotion across campus. Aller was elected as USUSA graduate studies senator and was able to write mental health week in his charter.

“I was really passionate about continuing those types of things so I was able to get it passed in the grad study senator charter that mental health week should be a required piece.” Aller said.

Aller and then-USUSA President Trevor Olsen were able to form a committee tasked with planning Mental Health Week every year.

“From that point on it was me and Ty tag-teaming and we found student groups that were really excited about it,” Olsen said.

Rachael Fresh, a president’s cabinet member under the Olsen and who worked side by side with Aller and Olsen, said “when Ty Aller and the Student Body President made it such a big deal, that’s when everyone got on the same page. I think it’s important to recognize that this was the first step we ever took to addressing mental health week as a culture at Utah State.”

Olsen was also President of the Utah Student Association, an organization comprised of student body presidents from all Utah colleges. As president, Olsen was able to get the group talking about mental health across the state.

“Most of the officers had some personal interaction with mental health, whether it was personal or someone they knew around them,” he said. “So everyone seemed to really get on board with it.

Policies were changed, legislation was set in place for the next student body officers and, in 2017, mental health was declared a statewide crisis.

Fresh is overjoyed that the week still stands as a tradition. “This was our first step to addressing the issue and so I think it’s amazing that it’s still a tradition because it’s important to recognize how far we’ve come.”

— [michaella10645319@gmail.com](mailto:michaella10645319@gmail.com)



GRAPHIC COURTESY OF UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY  
Rachael Fresh speaks at the Stand Up To Suicide March on Mar. 24, 2018. This event was part of Mental Health Week on Utah State University’s campus.



# USU students impacted by statewide conversion therapy bill



PHOTO BY Leah Hogsten | The Salt Lake Tribune/via Associated Press  
Taryn Hiatt, Utah and Nevada chapter director with the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention, wipes away tears as members of the House Judiciary Committee opt to modify the conversion therapy bill. Rep. Craig Hall, R-West Valley City watched his colleagues dismantle his bill to end conversion therapy .

By Naomi Ward  
NEWS SENIOR WRITER

Eri Ethington, a transgender student at Utah State University, was heartbroken as she watched a bill proposing to ban conversion therapy die in the Utah Legislature.

“Watching elected officials, people who are supposed to be safeguarding the welfare of the people of Utah, corrupt a proposed law into an endorsement of torturing LGBTQ children was horrible,” Ethington said.

The bill, proposed by Rep. Craig Hall, R-West Valley City originally aimed to ban state-licensed therapists from practices intended to change sexual orientation or gender identity of minors. The revised bill did not address conversion therapy regarding gender identity and focuses specifically on prohibiting practices that would cause physical distress. After the series of revisions, Hall said he could no longer support his own bill.

After coming out in high school, Ethington was sent to conversion therapy, the practice of trying to change an individual’s sexual orientation or gender identity through a variety of

different techniques. The scientific consensus on conversion therapy asserts the practice is ineffective, and conversion therapy has been labeled as pseudoscience.

“When I came out in high school, I was sent to LDS Family Services to get ‘fixed,” Ethington said. “The therapist told me that I was risking my soul by ‘choosing’ to be this way, and told both me and my parents that if I didn’t attend a special camp where I would be isolated from friends and family for several months to change who I was, then I would be dead within a few years because God doesn’t look favorably on LGBTQ people.”

Ethington said she told her family after a few sessions that she would not go back and was then kicked out of the house, living homeless for several months of high school.

“It’s devastating to have your support structures ripped away from you in that room, to be told your family, friends, church and beliefs will all be stripped from you just because you are a little different from other people,” Ethington said. “It took a long time to recover from that abuse and rebuild my world.”

Even now, as an adult

almost a decade later, Ethington said she sometimes still wakes up “in a panic.” She is not alone.

“I’ve had other friends who went through the electro-shock and vomit-inducing programs, and recovering from it and learning to love themselves has been even more difficult for them,” Ethington said.

She said the Facebook group for Utah survivors of conversion therapy that she is a part of welcomes new members every year, including teens who have experienced homelessness or suicidal ideation after undergoing the therapy.

“Honestly, unless you’ve been through it yourself, it’s impossible to describe the physical and mental toll, the torture, of going through that process – whether it involves physical torture or not,” Ethington said. “But because these are children, most people don’t see it or know it’s still happening.”

Ethington plans to study social work and work with LGBTQ youth.

— naomiyokoward@gmail.com  
@naomiyokoward

# Everyone is impacted: USU professor opens up about mental health struggles

By Michaella Whitney  
NEWS STAFF WRITER

*Editor’s note: to protect her privacy, The Utah Statesman is identifying the professor by a pseudonym*

After doctors diagnosed her post-traumatic stress disorder

teach the classes I wish to create, where I have this population of students, that aren’t crazy middle schooler or high schoolers, who are motivated and I think that that is something that gives me purpose.”

She said she enjoys life when students are interested in

what they love because that will, in her words, will “keep you hanging.”

“I think that emotional issues, mental issues, whatever you want to call them are a huge stigma in this country and it needs to stop,” the professor said. “Because there

“You have to deal with that on a daily basis and you have to go one with your life on a daily basis,”

—Utah State University professor

and fibromyalgia at 27-years-old, the pain was “unbearable because it’s a pain that no one can really grasp.”

“You have to deal with that on a daily basis and you have to go one with your life on a daily basis,” said Maria, a Utah State University professor who agreed to talk about her mental experiences under a pseudonym.

She has found treatments through medication and therapists.

“I’m under treatment to be able to go through life on a daily basis and even when I feel like I touch rock bottom, I know that thinking that there are better days ahead is really important,” the professor said.

She has been able to find purpose in her suffering by doing what she loves.

“I have the luxury to do something I absolutely love doing,” she said. “Here I am in a place where they let me

learning more and ask lots of questions, students who touch her heart.

“You let me touch your heart and you touch my heart, it’s all reciprocal,” she said. “You guys are in one way or another carrying me and it keeps me wanting to stay alive. It’s just about staying alive at the end of the day. That’s something that my profession gives me.”

This professor is aware of the challenges that arise on a day to day basis.

“You have ups and downs,” she says. “You have to find a way to deal with that. It’s a lot of isolation, it’s a lot of acceptance. You’ve got to accept what’s going on and you’re going through all kinds of phases. It changes your identity, it changes who you are and so it’s changes everything from one day to another.”

But she encourages those with mental health to do

are people out there who are really suffering who don’t want to talk about it because they don’t want to be judged. Let’s stop judging people. Let us stop judging people. Let us be more accepting.”

She says that mental health is no different from breaking a leg. A person with a broken leg will get the correct medication and therapy to heal. She says it’s the same way with mental health.

“Mental health and emotional health has to be taken seriously enough because there are people who actually take their lives,” she said. “It’s okay to have these kinds of problems. We can live with it. I think that we need, a little bit more than everyone else, feelings of love, and to not feel judged.”

— michaella10645319@gmail.com

# What to do when you have the winter blues

By Taylor Cripe  
NEWS CONTRIBUTOR

Seasonal affective disorder (SAD) is classified as a recurrent major depressive disorder, according to Psychology Today. It is a disorder commonly observed during the winter months, and in climates that have darker days and longer winters.

Cristine Price, a counselor for Family Solutions Counseling in Logan, said SAD is a persistent disorder and mainly affects those who are already susceptible to depression.

“It is much easier for this disorder to affect those who already struggle with feelings of hopelessness,” Price said.

SAD is no different from other disorders in that it requires a “trigger episode,” according to Anna Whisler, the program director for Family Solutions Counseling.

“After the trigger episode, people may feel worthless, guilty, have a lack of motivation, and isolate themselves,” Whisler said.

Whisler says the change in seasons becomes the “trigger episode,” causing a serotonin imbalance due to the lack of sunlight. The lower amounts of serotonin then increase a

person’s likelihood of being depressed.

In addition to its symptoms, SAD can also have a negative impact on daily life.

“It can make wanting to get up and go to class extremely difficult,” Whisler said, “People tend to feel like a burden.”

Price, says this is one of the worst parts.

“People tend to ask themselves, is my state a burden on others?” Price said.

According to Psychology Today, SAD can affect sleep patterns as well as cause weight gain and fatigue. While it is common for more individuals to have symptoms of depression during the winter months, both Whisler and Price say that it is not something to be ignored.

“If you have more days than not where you feel down and hopeless, you should seek help,” Whisler said. “This disorder can wreak havoc on your life in a short period of time. People can lose jobs or relationships.”

If detected early on, people can be prepared for the hormonal changes associated with SAD. Whisler says that working with therapists in the fall and making a game plan can

see “Winter blues” PAGE 4



PHOTO BY CIMARON NEUGEBAUER  
BULLEN HALL AT UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY COVERED IN SNOW.



“Winter blues” FROM PAGE 3

be beneficial.

“Be prepared, think, what didn’t work last winter?” Whisler said. “If you love running outdoors, how can you do it indoors?”

According to Price, having a positive mindset will also go a long way towards recovery. Price has written a book called “The Gift of Gratitude,” where she details her own struggles surrounding college, depression and SAD.

“Training my mind to be in a state of gratitude gave me relief from depression,” Price said.

Vitamin D supplements and light therapy are also options to deal with the negative effects of SAD.

When asked what advice they would give to college students, both therapists said they wanted to offer words of encouragement.

“A lot of people experience this disorder, especially students new to the area,” Whisler said. “Students that come from out of town are usually not prepared for Logan winters. This can be a shock to the system.

“When students struggle, they need to understand that it’s not them, it’s the climate,” Price said.“There needs to be more support on campus so that students do not struggle.”

Whisler said she wants students to know that they do not have to be alone.

“There are a lot of resources to help you, this is not something you have to go through by yourself,” she said.

Students who are struggling with symptoms of SAD or other depressive disorders can contact Counseling and Psychological Services in the Taggart Student Center on campus.Family Solutions also has a blog post to help students better understand SAD. <https://www.family-solutionsutah.org/blog/beating-the-wasatch-winter-blues>

— [taylorcripe@gmail.com](mailto:taylorcripe@gmail.com)

# Abortion restrictions, stronger beer and smoking bills pass

By Joseph Gedon and Lindsay Whitehurst  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — Utah legislators wrapped up their 45-day annual session Thursday after passing abortion restrictions, reaching a deal to raise alcohol levels in beer and moving to restrict underage marriage.

Here’s a look at some of the record 573 bills passed this year:

**BEER ALCOHOL LEVELS**

A compromise will raise the amount of alcohol available in beer sold at grocery and convenience stores to 4 percent starting in November, up from 3.2 percent. Supporters said a failure to raise the limit would lead to a lack of beers on the shelves because big brewers aren’t producing as many low-alcohol beers as the market shrinks. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which counts most lawmakers as members, had opposed an earlier proposal to raise the alcohol percentage to 4.8 percent.

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**ABORTION**

Lawmakers have passed a measure sponsored by Republican Rep. Cheryl Acton that would ban abortion after a fetus reaches 18 weeks gestational age, which could be among the strictest in the country. Exceptions include if the pregnancy was a result of rape or is a serious detriment to the mother’s health. The American Civil Liberties Union of Utah has already said it will sue if the measure is signed into law.

Another measure to ban abortions sought only because a fetus has been diagnosed with Down syndrome has also been sent to Gov. Gary Herbert’s desk. It would only go into effect if a similar law is upheld elsewhere. Utah law currently prohibits abortion past the 22nd week.

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**GUN LAWS**

Lawmakers strengthened the “stand-your-ground” law by stating there’s no duty to retreat, but did not pass a measure that would have declared the state didn’t need any new gun laws. They also passed a voluntary suicide-prevention measure focused on education and gun-lock distribution that was supported by the gun



PHOTO BY Francisco Kjolseth/The Salt Lake Tribune via AP  
U.S. Senate President Stuart Adams, R-Layton, works the remaining hours on the final day of the Legislative session at the Utah Capitol on Thursday, March 14, 2019.

lobby.

A proposed “red-flag law” allowing police to temporarily confiscate guns of those deemed to be a threat died without a hearing. A measure allowing family members to voluntarily give up firearms passed.

A proposal inspired by the death of University of Utah student Lauren McCluskey to hold gun owners civilly liable if they loan firearms used in a crime died in committee.

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**SMOKING AGE**

Lawmakers have passed a plan to raise the tobacco-buying age from 19 to 21, with exceptions for military members. The measure sponsored by Republican Rep. Steve Eliason would phase in the change, putting it fully into place by January 2021. It comes as some cities raise the ages themselves.

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**SLAVERY**

Voters will be asked next year whether to remove a provision in the state constitution that allows slavery as punishment for crime. Lawmakers signed off on the measure championed by the sole black member of the Legislature, Democratic Rep. Sandra Hollins.

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**AID FOR PEOPLE LEAVING POLYGAMOUS GROUPS**

Lawmakers passed a proposal to allow people escaping polygamy to receive money from a crime-victims fund. Anyone leaving a polygamous community is qualified to apply, but to receive the compensation they must make a report to law enforcement and cooperate with an investigation. Analysts are estimating the fund would pay out about \$3,500 a year per victim starting in 2020.

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**UNDERAGE MARRIAGE**

Legislation is sitting on Herbert’s desk that bans marriage completely for those 15 and younger, and requires judicial and parental approval for 16 and 17-year-olds. It also outlaws marriages with age gaps larger than seven years. The proposal initially aimed to ban all underage marriage but was later amended by Democratic sponsor Rep. Angela Romero. Current state law says 15-year-olds can marry with judicial approval and 16 and 17-year-olds only need consent from a parent.

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**U.S. CONSTITUTION**

A call for a new Constitutional convention passed, adding Utah to several states that have approved similar measures. Republican sponsor Sen. Evan Vickers believes a convention to revisit the Constitution is necessary to combat what he sees as federal overreach resulting in national debt and manipulation of federal mandates. It requires two-thirds of all states to approve similar resolutions.



PHOTO BY Francisco Kjolseth/The Salt Lake Tribune via AP  
Abraham Roe creates large soap bubbles on the front capitol of the Utah Capitol during the last day of the Legislative session on Thursday, March 14, 2019.

# CRIB SHEET

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# Examining Utah’s unique relationship with religion and mental health

By **Shelby Black**  
STUDENT LIFE SENIOR WRITER

There is no doubt that Utah has a unique culture. Things like fry sauce, mountains, weird spellings of names, soda and sugar cookie shops, and summer vacations to Bear Lake are all second nature to Utahns. Another cultural distinction is the large number of members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints that live in Utah.

Culture can have a significant effect on people and their mental health. As mental health issues have grown in recent years, some members of the LDS church have had to balance managing their mental health with being active in their faith. This has brought challenges as well as positive learning experiences for those involved.

Harper Forsgren has dealt with many of these challenges, and she hopes to share her story and message with others. Forsgren is originally from Richmond, Utah. She attended Utah State University and recently transferred to Brigham Young University to continue pursuing her nursing degree.

She served as a full-time missionary in the California Anaheim mission. During her time there, she developed Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, which continues to affect her after her mission.

Harper now lives day to day with PTSD, but she doesn’t let this define her. Instead, she uses her experiences to advocate for mental health and help explain difficult topics in LDS culture on her blog, which she and her sister share.

In the beginning, Harper said it was difficult to want to be a part of the LDS faith because she felt it had let her down.

“I didn’t have any desire to be active because for me, a big problem was that I felt like I was supposed to go on a mission, but then I came back and it gave me mental illness,” Forsgren said. “Then I felt like I was supposed to go to BYU and it made it worse.”

She explained that such doubts can create a feeling of isolation, and it can be hard to know your place within your culture. Forsgren has had to create her own way.

“I don’t necessarily feel like there was place for me, but I am making there be a place,” Forsgren said.

Feeling out of place is not uncommon for others within the LDS culture who live with mental illness. Annie Romano is a psychology student at Utah State University. Romano experiences social anxiety. She explained that this can create difficult situations when trying to attend church services.

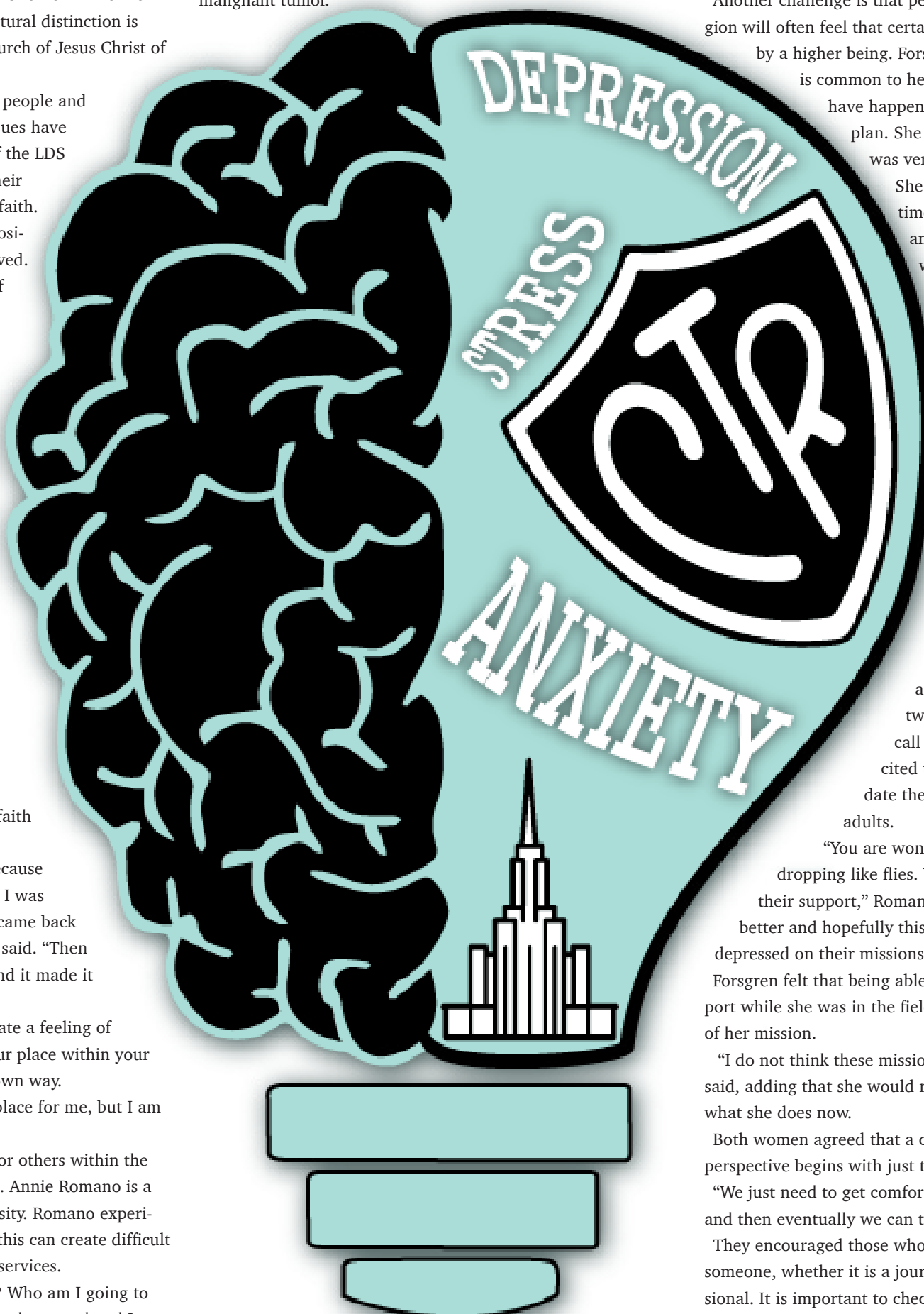
“I think, ‘Who am I going to sit next to? Who am I going to talk to?’ Sometimes I feel a distance from the gospel and I can feel forgotten and abandoned,” Romano said. “It is like, why do I have to deal with this? I literally have this disorder in my brain, and it feels so unfair sometimes.”

For many years, the LDS church was silent on mental illness. There was an acknowledgment of physical disabilities, but those who were struggling on the inside weren’t sure where to turn.

“It feels like a physical debilitation, but it is in your brain and it is constant. The problem is people don’t know you have it, and that makes it harder,” Romano said.

In more recent years, LDS church officials have begun to speak on the topic of mental health. Church leader Jeffrey R. Holland gave a talk at the October 2013 General Conference

that confronted emotional health. In this talk, Holland stated, “However bewildering this all may be, these afflictions are some of the realities of mortal life, and there should be no more shame in acknowledging them than in acknowledging a battle with high blood pressure or the sudden appearance of a malignant tumor.”



GRAPHIC BY **Ean Donehy**

Forsgren said that this was pretty groundbreaking for the LDS culture. “We need to stop acting like mental health isn’t real,” she said. “If you have these mental illness, you need to go talk to someone and get help like you would if you were physically ill.”

Throughout their journey of living with mental health in Utah’s LDS culture, both Forsgren and Romano have run into many misconceptions.

One misconception that Forsgren battled with was the idea that mental health is determined by “righteousness” within one’s religion.

“It is so unhealthy to hear and to promote this. I was a very obedient missionary and my mission still sucked, and that’s OK,” Forsgren said. A huge part of Forsgren’s message is that it is OK for someone to not be OK, and it is OK for an LDS missionary experience to not be 100 percent perfect.

Another challenge is that people who are members of a religion will often feel that certain parts of their life were dictated by a higher being. Forsgren commented that in Utah, it is common to hear people say that bad things that have happened to them are a part of God’s plan. She said during her difficult times this was very damaging to hear.

She also explained that people many times only want to show the good and happy sides of themselves, when really it is not always so.

“People also always try to paint the best of themselves. You try to be so perfect, so you never paint the journey. You always just paint the outcome,” Forsgren said. “We don’t necessarily talk about the times where we pray and nothing happens. We are so worried with looking a certain way.”

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is adapting to recognize mental health challenges. Recently the church changed how many times missionaries can call home. Instead of twice a year, missionaries can now call home once a week. Many have cited that this change is to accommodate the mental health of these young adults.

“You are wondering why these missionaries are dropping like flies. You can’t cut them off from all of their support,” Romano said. “This makes the transition better and hopefully this will help them be not as upset or depressed on their missions.”

Forsgren felt that being able to talk to her mom and get support while she was in the field could have changed the course of her mission.

“I do not think these missionaries are soft at all,” Forsgren said, adding that she would rather be called soft than deal with what she does now.

Both women agreed that a cultural change in mental health perspective begins with just talking about it.

“We just need to get comfortable with being uncomfortable, and then eventually we can talk about it,” Romano said.

They encouraged those who are struggling to open up to someone, whether it is a journal, a close friend, or a professional. It is important to check on friends and truly ask how they are doing. For people to understand what they were going through, they had to share their struggles.

“I wished people knew that you are capable of feeling joy and also capable of feeling complete isolation and sorrow, and that’s OK,” Forsgren said. “For me, I started to actually feel like I was understood when I started talking.”

There are many resources available for those struggling with similar situations. To seek help, please visit campus resources here; for more information on the LDS church and mental health, visit here.

—shelby.black@aggiemail.usu.edu  
@shelbsterblack

# SOFTBALL

VS. UNLV

FRIDAY | 3 PM

SATURDAY | 3 PM

SEAT CUSHION GIVEAWAY  
WHILE SUPPLIES LAST!

SUNDAY | 12 PM





GRAPHIC BY Ellie Giauque

By Alek Nelson  
STUDENT LIFE STAFF WRITER

Because of the various causes of mental health problems and differing experiences of individuals, mental health is a difficult and complex topic. While different people may have different needs, creating healthy habits can help maintain or improve mental health. Here are some professionally-recommended habits used by students at Utah State University to help ease and control the symptoms of mental health problems.

## 1. Get active

Exercise is one of the most common recommendations to improve mental health. According to multiple studies, regular exercise is shown to not only help with physical fitness, but to relieve stress, improve sleep and decrease symptoms of anxiety and depression. Angela Johnson, a USU student majoring in outdoor recreational therapy, uses exercise and outdoor activities to handle the stress of schoolwork and other responsibilities. “For me, it’s a let-out,” Johnson said. “It helps me get away from the things that are stressing me out.” She also said that getting outside and exercising helps her be happier and more productive. Whether it is taking a walk around campus or going snowboarding, daily physical activity is an effective tool in increasing confidence and building positive mental health.

## 2. Limit screen time, especially social media

With the advent of the smartphone, we now have screens in front of us almost constantly. Recent research from The Nielsen Company found that American adults spend over 11 hours a day interacting with media. While social media allows for easier communication between friends and family, it may be taking a toll on the mental health of its users. A study from the University of Pennsylvania observed 143 undergraduate students and their mental health statuses. One group of students limited their social media use to 30 minutes a day while the other group used it as normal. After three weeks, the group that limited social media use showed a significant decrease in loneliness and depression. As a result, researchers in this study recommend setting a limit of 30 minutes of social media use every day. Self-monitoring screen time is also believed to decrease symptoms of anxiety. Monitoring social media use and screen time is now very easy, as many smartphones have built-in or downloadable apps that can help track app usage.

## 3. Find activities you enjoy

Nicole Fleming, a student studying computer engineering, found that sculpting helped her deal with stress during high school. Since coming to USU, she has taken up painting to help her maintain her mental health. “It takes a level of focus that has

just helped me forget about what things are really stressful,” she said. While painting might not be your activity of choice, it is important to find hobbies to do outside of schoolwork. These types of activities, whether it be playing the guitar or board games with friends, can help wind the brain down after a stressful day and give a chance to focus on other things in life.

## 3. Watch what you eat

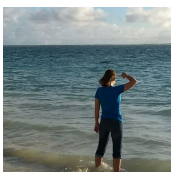
When feeling down or anxious, it can be easy to fill meals with heavily processed comfort food. However, research shows that people will be better off eating healthy, both mentally and physically. In a post on the blog of the Harvard Medical School, Doctor Eva Selhub argued that what we eat influences our brains and how we function. She said that research has shown that diets high in fruits and vegetables, fish and unprocessed grains help regulate the levels of serotonin in our bodies. Serotonin helps regulate things like our sleep schedules and moods. This improved regulation results in better physical and mental health.

## 4. Take time to be mindful

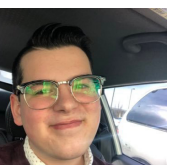
Mindfulness is a common technique to help maintain mental health, and it has become more popular in recent years. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, director of the Center for Mindfulness at the University of Massachusetts Medical School, mindfulness is “paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally.” Mindfulness is one of the core principles of meditation and yoga. Jessica Spackman, a senior in technical communication at USU, has found that doing yoga multiple times a week has helped her take control of her mental health. “I am prone to anxiety and have noticed a difference in the days and weeks when I have done yoga and when I have taken time for myself,” she said. Yoga and meditation resources can be easily found on the internet. Spackman, for example, practices yoga on her own by using YouTube, including the popular channel “Yoga with Adriene.” Meditation apps like Calm and Headspace have also become popular and include routines that range in length from one minute to an hour. Many of these apps offer free trials, and Headspace offers a student plan at \$9.99 a year. In addition, many free resources are compiled on the “Bio-feedback” page of USU’s Counseling and Psychological Services website. These resources can be found underneath the section entitled “Relaxation Audios, Websites & Apps” (counseling.usu.edu/biofeedback/index). Other resources and tips to improve overall wellness can be found at <http://aggiwellness.usu.edu/> or by visiting CAPS in room 306 of the Taggart Student Center.

—alek.nelson@aggiemail.usu.edu  
@nelsonalek

# TWEETS of the WEEK



**@christynagard**  
Sometimes I remember that BYU is not on spring break this week because they do not in fact \*have\* a spring break, and then I feel a little better about my own life.



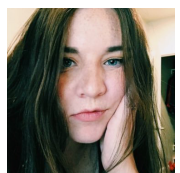
**@GageCarling**  
Tried to find out how to get into the bell tower of old main  
Mission failed



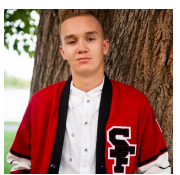
**@Jen\_tach**  
How I’m feelin about school tomorrow



**@coopylow**  
Anyone else forget they were in school?



**@kenzhastheforce**  
I’m at the game and I’m still sweating, I feel like I just gave birth, I feel like I ran a marathon, I DIED AND WAS REBORN ABOUT 6 times.  
#AggiesAllTheWay



**@t\_creer54**  
We punch tickets, not fire extinguishers. #aggiesalltheway



**@CoachSmith\_USU**  
LET’S DANCE!!!







GRAPHIC BY Regan Johnson

**By Erick Graham Wood**  
STUDENT LIFE STAFF WRITER

According to Mental Health America, over 44 million American adults have a mental health condition. Although depressive episodes in youth are on the rise, 62 percent of youth with depression or anxiety receive no treatment.

Religion and politics are two of the largest overall reasons for an increase in anxiety disorders, as reported by the Canadian Broadcast Channel.

The cause for the increase in youth cases isn’t certain, but anxietycentre.com suggested multiple possibilities, including increased parental pressures, adoption of electronic media, increased terrorist threats, or a rise in child abuse.

The American Psychological Association has recorded a rise in anxiety since 2016. In 2017, two-thirds of Americans said they were stressed or anxious.

Utah’s rate of depression and anxiety is in the highest percentile, according to USA Today in 2018. The report from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention showed that Montana, Alaska, Wyoming, New Mexico and Utah have the highest suicide rates in the United States.

Kimball Gardner, the prevention program director at the National Alliance on Mental Health’s Utah Chapter, told USA Today that “we are a culture of pick yourself up by your bootstraps” people, and many people think they have to do

everything on their own.

“It is not unmanly, a failure or laziness,” Gardner said about getting help. “It’s a real wonderful thing to send a message to others: Don’t wait. Don’t try to tough it out.”

USU student Camila Despain sees this need to acknowledge the realities of mental health disorders. “I’ve dealt with depression and anxiety for years now, and I’ve learned how to manage,” Despain said. “However, there are so many young people who are told that it’s just ‘hormones and teenage rebellion,’ but we need to acknowledge their very real emotions. Youth who don’t learn good coping skills turn into adults seeking unhealthy outlets.”

The Census Bureau reported that although more Americans are insured and have access to care in the past four years, there is a shortage of mental health workers, with a need four times greater than currently staffed.

This need can be seen at Utah State University, where Counseling and Psychological Services are booked weeks and sometimes months in advance.

To combat an increase in students seeking counseling, Dr. Bonnie Glass-Coffin started an interfaith initiative at USU where students could meet with local clergy volunteering their time.

“Currently there is a waitlist to visit with counselors on campus,” Glass-Coffin said in February. “We decided to offer

this service for those who may be on the waitlist and need to discuss issues of faith. This way we can help students quicker and free up space on those wait lists.”

—erickwood97@gmail.com  
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## Campus resources help sexual assault survivors overcome trauma and PTSD

**By Abigail Slade**  
STUDENT LIFE STAFF WRITER

There are survivors of sexual assault everywhere, and there are many resources at Utah State University to help survivors deal with post-traumatic stress disorder and other challenges.

The Sexual Assault and Anti-Violence Information office, USU Counseling and Psychological Services, and the Title IX office are the main on-campus organizations dedicated to helping victims of interpersonal violence and sexual assault.

These resources help survivors receive medical care, file reports on campus or in the criminal justice system, help with time management and organization, and many other things that a survivor may need.

There are also therapists available to help survivors work through trauma and find productive ways to move forward while dealing with emotions and memories.

Recently, there has been a growing focus on how experiencing sexual assault could cause PTSD. Dr. Michael Twohig, a professor of psychology at USU, specializes in working with individuals experiencing PTSD and has collaborated with the resource offices on campus. He said that “not every person who experiences a sexual assault will be diagnosable with PTSD, but many will be.”

To this same end, Felicia Gallegos, the Outreach and Prevention Coordinator at SAAVI, said that it is important to understand that while there are common patterns, “everybody’s experience is different, and everybody’s reaction to what they experience is different.”

For example, one survivor may cope with PTSD by being physically, mentally and emotionally drained, but it could be the exact opposite for someone else: they could channel all their energy into work or school to stay distracted.

Other reactions include depression, anxiety, inability to focus,

eating disorders, nightmares, flashbacks, intermittent remembrance, drug and/or alcohol abuse and self-harm.

Gallegos said that during a traumatic situation, the body has three common responses. “We have fight, flight, or freeze,” she said. “This freeze response is what we call ‘tonic immobility,’ and that’s what many survivors usually experience. Following the traumatic event, you’re still in that frozen space, and as you heal, your brain is slowly ‘thawing.’”

There are benefits of seeking help during this “thawing” period, mainly to understand that the freeze response is normal and that tonic immobility could be a starting point for post-traumatic stress.

Feeling guilt, shame, or confusion about their experience is a common challenge for survivors when deciding whether or not to come forward about an assault. However, Gallegos said that the best thing someone can do is to banish those thoughts.

“The majority of situations happen in a gray area. It’s rarely black or white,” Gallegos said. “Almost every single person who walks through our door has those thoughts..

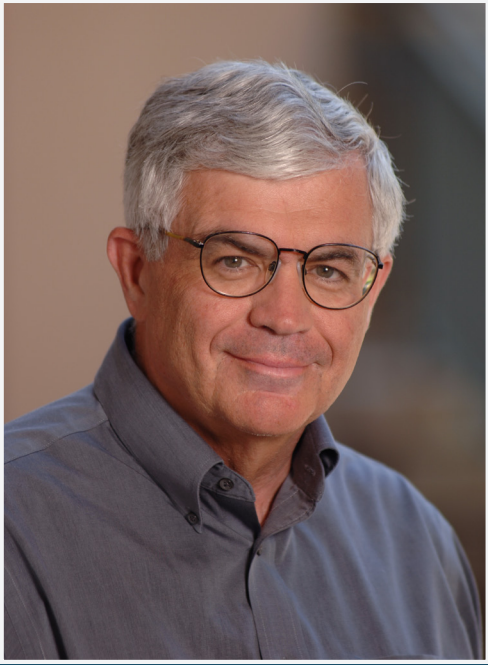
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File Photo Illustration



**George S. Eccles Memorial Lecture in Economics**

*March 26, 2019  
2:30pm – 3:30pm  
Perry Pavilion, Huntsman Hall*



**Dr. John B. Taylor:**  
***The Outlook for Economic Policy and the Economy***

John B. Taylor is the Mary and Robert Raymond Professor of Economics at Stanford University and the George P. Shultz Senior Fellow in Economics at the Hoover Institution. He formerly served as senior economist and member of the President’s Council of Economic Advisers and is considered to be one of the world’s foremost experts on central banking and monetary policy.







# Stereotypes

## Making sense of a crazy world

By Alek Nelson  
STUDENT LIFE STAFF WRITER

We can't comprehend how everything in the world works; we still find ways to grapple with a complicated world. One way we do this is by processing and organizing the people, places, and things in our lives. Whether it's a metal filing cabinet full of color-coded folders or a friend "Kondo-ing" their apartment, we see results of our efforts to organize the world around us.

"The human compulsion to group people and objects together was ingrained in our being since we evolved," said Charlie Caruso, a businesswoman and author. "We need to group things, group the dangerous and unknown from the 'safe to eat' or the 'it won't eat you' categories. Without the ability to categorize these threats, our ancestors wouldn't have survived."

But what happens when we rely on these categorizations to understand people, though?

While labeling allows us to process the world more easily, it also simplifies how we view the things being labeled — including human beings.

This oversimplification can result in stereotyping, but people are

not stagnant objects. We grow in different areas throughout life and we become different as we have different experiences.

Labels do not allow for growth. They simplify a person down to a word and don't allow for any variance.

We see results of labels in many places. It can be seen in the women's

***"The only label that we should always remember to stick to ourselves and others is that of a human being."***

suffrage and civil rights movements of the nineteenth century as groups of people fought to break from the labels that had been placed upon them for centuries.

Today, we see and hear labels applied to our generation on social media sites and cable news all the time, such as "snowflakes" or "millennials." Even terms like "republican" and "democrat" are types of destructive labels in today's political atmosphere.

Labeling people brings with it a high-school-clique type of atmosphere, where athletes and band kids have certain molds to fill, and it is seen as weird if people in these groups do anything "out of the ordinary."

Labeling others or ourselves, whether it be based on race, sexual orientation, age or socioeconomic status, keeps us from seeing and understanding the complexity of the individual pinned underneath that label. It keeps people from progressing in life, something we all want and need. People are messy subjects, and are not meant to be

placed in neat, tidy boxes with printed, permanent labels.

The only label that we should always remember to stick to ourselves and others is that of a human being. We each have layers of immense complexity and do

not deserve to be limited by a label we place on ourselves or others. I hope that we can strive to view others, especially those we don't easily relate to, for who they really are deep down.

We can't simplify a person and their diverse experiences down to an easy-to-digest label that sits well in our framework of thinking. Rather, we must consistently strive to see each other as fellow human beings trying to make sense of this crazy world. Doing so will create more thoughtful policy, greater humanity and kindness for others.

In a world as confusing and complex as ours, that is what we need.



### Letters to the editor

Have an opinion you'd like to share? Email your letter to [opinion@usustatesman.com](mailto:opinion@usustatesman.com).

Letters must not contain personal attacks or other inappropriate language and should be limited to 400 words or less. Anonymous letters will also not be published; please include your name and a phone number or email address (neither of which will be published).

Letters received by The Utah Statesman will be published online at [www.usustatesman.com](http://www.usustatesman.com), as well as in the print issue of the Statesman, depending on space.



B

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		8			4		6	3
	6				1		5	

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COMIC BY Steve Weller

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CALENDAR					
MARCH 19 - 25					
TUESDAY 3/19	WEDNESDAY 3/20	THURSDAY 3/21	FRIDAY 3/22	SATURDAY 3/23	MONDAY 3/25
<b>Speaker: Lifestyle Rx for anxiety &amp; depression</b> 12:30pm TSC Auditorium	<b>Teacher Fair North</b> 9:00am Taggart Student Center 0175 Old Main Hill Logan, UT	<b>Stress management workshop</b> 11:30am TSC 310	<b>Service Activity</b> 11:00am-1:00pm Library, TSC, Business Building, Edu. Building	<b>Suicide Awareness Walk</b> 11:00am TSC Patio	<b>Mental Health First Aid - ARC</b> 1:00pm Utah State University 1400 Old Main Hill Logan, UT
<b>Jazz at Caffe Ibis</b> 1:00pm Caffe Ibis 52 Federal Ave Logan, UT	<b>Tree Trimming and Tree Care with Rex Davis</b> 12:00pm Logan City Environmental Building Classroom 153 N 1400 W Logan, UT	<b>Speaking &amp; dinner: Katie Willcox</b> 7:00pm TSC Ballroom	<b>Mental Health First Aid - ARC</b> 1:00pm Utah State University 1400 Old Main Hill Logan, UT	<b>Canyon Conversations Series (SNC)</b> 11:00am Stokes Nature Center 2696 E. Highway 89 Logan, UT	<b>Peaceful Healing</b> 3:30pm Sunshine Terrace Foundation 248 W 300 North Logan, UT
<b>Soup ‘n Stroke Support Group</b> 4:00pm Sunshine Terrace Foundation 248 W 300 North Logan, UT	<b>Exercise for your mind</b> 4:00pm The ARC	<b>Helicon West Open Mic Night</b> 7:00pm Logan City Library	<b>Tchaikovsky, Petipa, and The Sleeping Beauty - Music Scholars Series</b> 5:00pm Family Life Bldg Caine Room Logan, UT	<b>Relative Race</b> 12:00pm Logan Tabernacle Logan, UT	
<b>Thoughts, feelings, behaviors workshop</b> 5:00pm TSC 310B	<b>North by North w/ The Strange</b> 7:00pm The Cache Venue 119 S Main Street Logan, UT	<b>Minetti Quartett</b> 7:30pm Caine College of the Arts Logan, UT	<b>ABBA Sing Along</b> 7:00pm The Cache Venue 119 S Main Street Logan, UT	<b>Mental Health First Aid - ARC</b> 1:00pm Utah State University 1400 Old Main Hill Logan, UT	
	<b>True Aggie Night</b> Midnight A-Block		<b>Science Unwrapped: Angstrom</b> 7:00pm ESLC 130	<b>USU Big Band Swing Team “Swingset” Benefit Dance</b> 7:00pm Elite Hall 98 W. Main Logan, UT	

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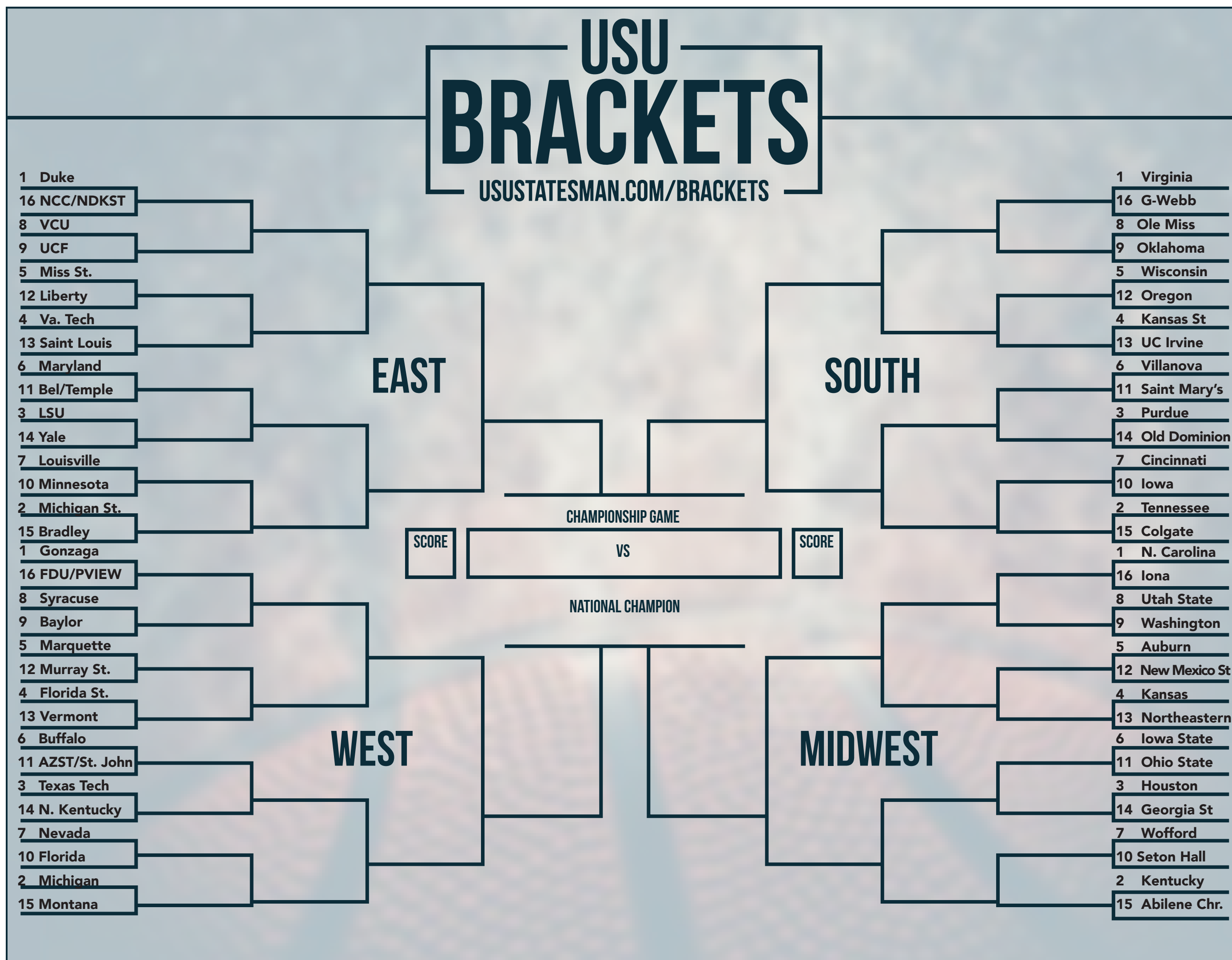


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# Mountain West Review





# First round: Utah State 62 - Colorado State 59



PHOTO BY Megan Nielsen

The Utah State women's basketball team huddles up prior to its Mountain West Conference tournament first-round matchup with Colorado State. The Aggies defeated the Rams 62-59 to advance to the second round for the first time since 2017.

**By Dalton Renshaw**  
SPORTS STAFF WRITER

Colorado State was able to play the Aggies closer than their first two meetings, but Utah State was able to come away with a 62-59 in its opening game of the Mountain West Conference Tournament.

Newly honored all-conference player Shannon Dufficy wasn't the lead contributor for the Aggies in the first half of Sunday's opening game against Colorado State, but this wasn't a problem for Utah State. Senior guard Rachel Brewster continued to be in good form as she put up nine of the Aggies' 30 points in the first half. Junior guard Olivia West also had nine points at the half, going 3-of-5 from deep. "Olivia and Rachel, we needed that first half out of them," said Utah State head coach Jerry Finkbeiner. "Definitely needed them."

However, Colorado State took advantage of Utah State failing to hit its shots in the third quarter, closing in on the Aggies' lead and gaining one of its own by the end of the quarter. Utah State shot 1-of-7 for the first four minutes of the quarter, allowing the Rams to close the gap. Overall, the Aggies ended up going 3-of-16 from the field as a team and were looking at a 38-37 deficit.

This didn't phase the Aggies. Utah State opened up the fourth quarter hungry to not let its tourna-

ment run end in the first game, going on an 11 to nothing run over the first three minutes of the quarter.

While Brewster led the team in the first half, it took a full team effort to turn the ship around in final two quarters. Brewster would go scoreless in the second half but Utah State ended the game with six players scoring more than eight points, including three in double figures.

"We've struggled all year long with scoring," Finkbeiner said. "Shannon's scored all year but we've had a hard time having other people score with her. The last five out of seven games, six out of seven games, we've finally had two, three, sometimes four double-figure girls."

Dufficy would make up for a slow first half by scoring seven points and pulling down eight rebounds in the second half. She ended the game with 11 points and 15 rebounds, netting an 18th double-double of the season, a Utah State single season record.

Junior guard Eliza West also broke a record in the game for the Aggies. She dished out three assists to set

the career assists record with 437, previously held by Jennifer Schlott. Freshman guard Steph Gorman stepped up for the Aggies as well in the second half, scoring nine of her 10 points in the final two quarters.

"We're now starting to get some punch there offensively and I think our late season run has been due to the fact we've started to score more points," Finkbeiner said.

Colorado State responded to Utah State's 11-to-0 run to open the quarter by going on a 17-to-8 run of its own over a six minute period toward the end of the game. Between all the ups and downs of the second half, Utah State was up by just one point with 30 seconds left in the game.

"I know there's two sides to the story here," Finkbeiner said. "Colorado State's view and our view. We did the things that we needed to do to get the win. So we're really proud of the girls."

A strange looking pump-fake free-throw from a Colorado State player gave the Aggies the ball back under 30 seconds and all Utah State had to do from there was make its free-throws, which it did. Utah State would go on to shoot 6-of-6 from the line to close out the game, securing a 62-59 earn and a trip to the next round.



PHOTO BY Savy Knapp



# Quarterfinals: Wyoming 64 - Utah State 41

**By Dalton Renshaw**  
SPORTS STAFF WRITER

LAS VEGAS (The Utah Statesman) — Monday night saw the Aggies fall to Wyoming 64-41, ending their tournament run in the quarterfinals.

Right out of the gates, Wyoming wanted to make sure that the game didn't result in a low scoring affair like the previous two meetings between these two teams this season. Within five minutes the Cowgirls were already off to a great start shooting the ball, continuing the form that got the team in the top-five nationally in three point percentage. Wyoming made seven of its first 10 shots, including 2-of-4 from deep.

By the end of the quarter Utah State was faced with an 18-9 deficit and not seeing a lot of options offensively.

"I think Wyoming is the best in the conference in the halfcourt," said Utah State head coach Jerry Finkbeiner. "They executed offensively really well. A lot of back screens, a lot of cuts and back doors."

Junior forward Shannon Dufficy was doing her best to keep the Aggies in the game by putting up 11 points at the half along with five rebounds. The all-conference forward would end up leading the team with 17 points and finishing one rebound shy of her 19th double-double of the season. Unfortunately for Utah State, one player contributing wasn't enough and Wyoming held a 37-21 lead at the half.

Wyoming was not only out-shooting the Aggies,



PHOTO BY **Megan Nielsen**

Utah State junior forward Marlene Aniambossou dives for a loose ball during Utah State's 64-41 loss to Wyoming in the quarterfinal round of the Mountain West Conference tournament.

but also was making its presence felt under the basket by cleaning up on the glass. Wyoming pulled down 18 rebounds in the first half, 10 more than Utah State, all while shooting 59 percent from the field.

"Defensively they're not the quickest group in the conference, but they're long and they anticipate well and they're always in your face," Finkbeiner said. "We just couldn't shake them tonight. You

know, if the game was to start off a little differently if they wouldn't have been as hot, if we would have made a couple more shots the reflection of the game could have been different."

A 13-to-2 run to start the third quarter put Utah State into an even deeper hole just five minutes into the second half. Wyom-

ing showed no signs of slowing down from the field and there even started to become a feeling of invincibility radiating from its side of the court.

The Cowgirls were once again led by its two all-conference senior forwards Marta Gomez and Bailee Cotton. Gomez led the team with 19 points and Cotton wasn't far behind with 14 herself. All-in-all Wyoming finished with four players in double figures and 53 percent shooting.

The fourth quarter wouldn't matter much in the grand scheme of the game as Wyoming scored just 12 points to the Aggies' 10, ending the game 64-41 and sending the Cowgirls to the semifinals and Utah State back to Logan.

Although the Aggies didn't make it past the second round of the tournament, the season can still be looked at rose colored glasses in comparison to recent history. Utah State finished conference play with a 16-15 record, only the second time the Aggies have finished with a winning record since joining the Mountain West Conference six seasons ago.

While an NCAA tournament berth isn't a possibility for USU, the Aggies still could be in the running for a number of other postseason tournaments. Finkbeiner alluded that the Aggies could still potentially receive an invitation to the Women's Invitational Tournament.



PHOTO BY **Megan Nielsen**

Utah State junior forward Shannon Dufficy lays the ball in past Wyoming's Bailee Cotton. Dufficy had 17 points and nine rebounds in the Aggies' loss.



# Merrill named Player of the Year, Aggies win 4 of 6 major awards



PHOTOS BY Tim Carpenter &amp; Megan Nielsen

(Left) Utah State junior guard Sam Merrill lays the ball up during USU's March 2 victory over Nevada. (Right) USU freshman center Neemias Queta celebrates Utah State's March 16 victory over San Diego State to win the Mountain West Conference tournament.

By Jason Walker

SPORTS SENIOR WRITER

The Utah State men's basketball team took home four of the possible six postseason awards for the Mountain West Conference. Head coach Craig Smith, junior guard Sam Merrill, and freshman center Neemias Queta all received honors as voted on by the head coaches in the conference.

Smith received Coach of the Year with Neemias Queta taking home not just Freshman of the Year, but Defensive Player of the Year as well. Sam Merrill won a close three-way race with Nevada's Caleb Martin and Jordan Caroline for the Player of the Year award.

Merrill finished second in the Mountain West in scoring at 21.0 points per game. He also finished second in PER (25.2), fourth in offensive rating (127.7) and sixth in assists per game (4.1). In the last four games of the regular season, the junior guard averaged 29.5 points, 6.5 rebounds and 2.8 assists. He also never left the floor in any of those four games which included two overtime contests.

Six other Aggies in history have won conference

player of the year, though Merrill is the first in the Mountain West era. Dean Hunger (1980 Big West), Greg Grant (1986 Big West), Eric Franson (1995 Big West), Jaycee Carroll (2008 WAC), Gary Wilkinson (2009 WAC) and Tai Wesley (2011 WAC) are the other POY winners.

Queta, who averaged 11.6 points and 8.8 rebounds in his freshman campaign, led the conference in blocks by a wide margin. He averaged 2.4 rejections per game (next closest was 1.6 by Nate Grimes). The freshman center also led the league in defensive rating (88.0), defensive box plus/minus (8.1) and was third in defensive win shares (2.2, slightly trailing the 2.3 of Martin and Caroline).

Both Queta and Merrill were also given recognition with selections to the All-Conference teams. Merrill was selected to be on the First Team All-Conference West with Queta getting on the Second Team and All-Defensive teams.

Since joining the conference at the start of the 2013-14 season, only one player has received one of the six individual awards. Koby McEwen received Freshman of the Year honors in 2016-17.

Merrill — who averaged career-highs in points,

rebounds, assists, steals and blocks — became the first Aggie to get on the First Team. Previously, Jalen Moore had climbed the highest on the Mountain West All-Conference ladder by being placed on the Second Team in 2014-15. The last First Team selection any Aggie got was Preston Medlin, a WAC First Team awardee in 2012.

Smith became the fourth USU coach to be given coach of the year honors. Rod Tueller, Larry Eustachy and Stew Morrill are the other three winners across the program's time in the Big West and WAC. Smith's 25 wins are the most all-time by a first-year head coach at Utah State. He also became the first-ever USU coach to win a regular season Mountain West title.

On Monday, the Mountain West media members announced their selections for each of these awards, mirroring the decisions of the MW coaches who voted for the official awards. Earlier on Tuesday, the U.S. Basketball Writers Association honored Smith, Merrill and Queta as part of the USBWA's District VIII. Smith received the District VIII Coach of the Year award with Merrill and Queta being All-District VIII First Team selections.



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# MOUNTAIN WEST CHAMPS

## Aggies defeat San Diego State in tournament championship game to earn first MWC title



PHOTO BY Matt Halton

Utah State's Diogo Brito cuts down the net following Utah State's 64-57 victory over San Diego State in the Mountain West Conference title game March 16. This was the Aggies' first title since joining the conference in 2013, and guarantees Utah State its first NCAA Tournament appearance since 2011.

By Jason Walker

SPORTS SENIOR WRITER

The Aggies are going to the big dance for the first time in nearly a decade.

No more questions. No more analyzing the bubble. No more trips to Joe Lunardi's latest NCAA bracket projections. It's settled.

With its 64-57 win Saturday over San Diego State — just the second win over the Aztecs since joining the Mountain West — Utah State became the true Mountain West champions, and with it, USU will receive an automatic berth to the NCAA Tournament.

Through the first 20 minutes, though, that result was far from a surety. SDSU's defense smothered the Aggies at times and though USU held a 34-32 lead at the break, it was either

team's game to win. Sam Merrill said that the teams' first half felt "pretty similar to the New Mexico game" in how they executed.

"We didn't feel like we played all that well in the first half," Merrill said. "And yet we were still up by two. So we were pretty confident coming out of the half."

Just to pull off a halftime lead seemed a small miracle with how hard many of Utah State's early goings were. But one player, Abel Porter, made it a whole lot easier. The redshirt sophomore, in just his 16th Division I start, played like a veteran. He racked up 10 points all while going a flawless 4 for 4 from the field, including 2 of 2 on 3-pointers.

"Abel is a gamer," Merrill said, adding, "Pre-game I could feel that he was locked in and ready. And obviously he's made such great

progress throughout the season and his confidence has gone up so much. And to be honest, it wasn't a surprise to us, because we know that Abel's that type of player."

Once the halftime break ended, though, Utah State decided it'd had enough of hanging with the Aztecs and reeled off a 13-0 run spanning a little under five and a half minutes. Merrill stood at the center of that early run, flanked by Brock Miller and Neemias Queta. The trio accounted for not only the entire 13-0 run to start the half, but 27 of the Aggies' 30 second-half points overall.

More impressive than the offensive output was the defensive silencing of SDSU's offense, which missed its first 10 shots of the second half and were held to 33 percent shooting in the game.

"To hold a team like that to 33 percent for the



game and 27 percent in the second half, that's how you're able to close out games," Smith said, "and that's how you're able to close out championships."

Merrill, named the conference tournament MVP to go with his regular season Player of the Year trophy, tallied a game-high 24 points — 15 in the second half. In his three-game tournament run, the junior guard averaged 23 points, five rebounds and five assists. He also shot 47.5 percent from the field and 92.6 percent from the free throw line.

Winning it all helped "validate what we did in the regular season," as head coach Craig Smith put it. Smith also elaborated on how impressed he is with his squad's overall body of work.

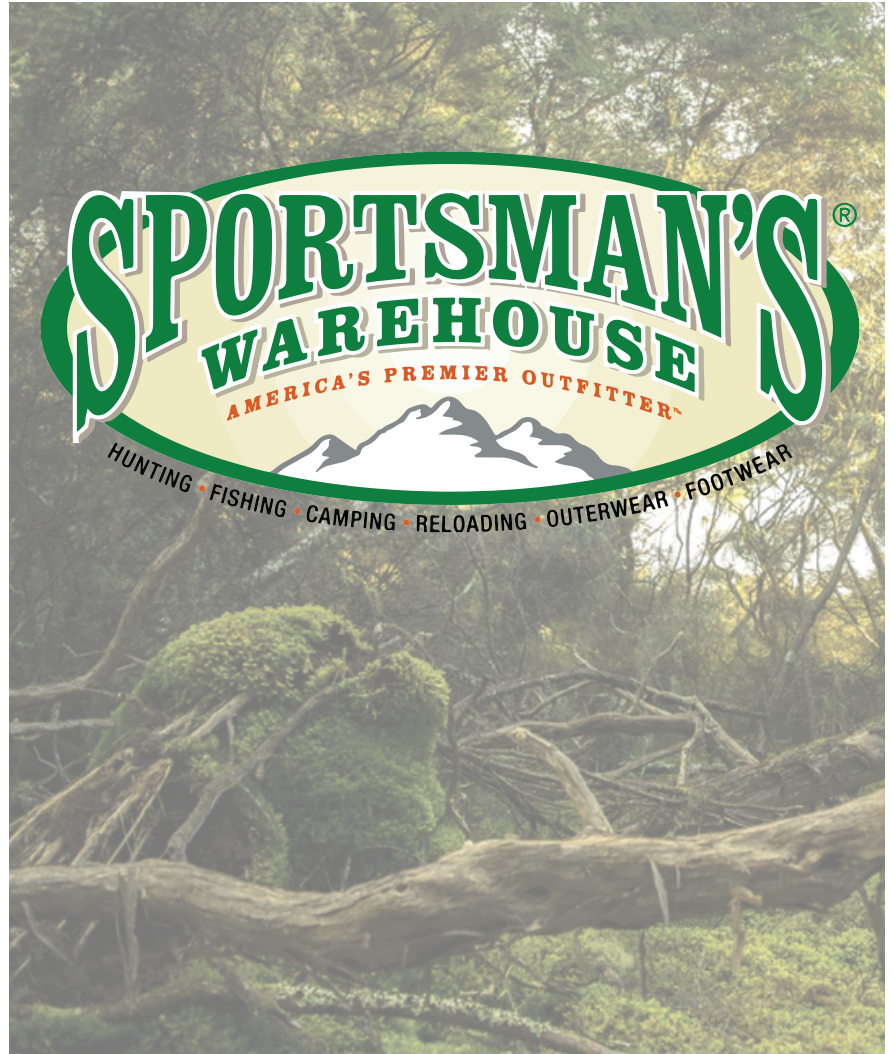
"It's just an amazing group," Smith said. "When you look at the growth that these guys had and we've talked about our youth and all that kind of stuff. You really think back to the year and not one time did we lose back-to-back games this year. Not one. You play 34 games in the schedule that we had and all the travel, to not lose back-to-back games is like incredibly difficult to do."

The ultimate goal for Utah State, and especially Merrill, isn't just to win regular season titles, conference tournament games, conference championships or even appear in the NCAA Tournament. It's about winning in March's biggest stage.

"This is incredible," Merrill said. "But I feel like we have a lot more left in the tank and we're going to definitely try and show that wherever we end up this next weekend."



Utah State guard Sam Merrill dribbles during the second half against the San Diego State Aztecs in the Mountain West Championship game in Las Vegas, NV, on March 16.





# Aggies bound for the 'Big Dance'

## Utah State earns first NCAA Tournament invite since 2011, will face Washington in first round

By Jason Walker

SPORTS SENIOR WRITER

Utah State will make its 21st NCAA Tournament appearance — and first since 2011 — this Friday as the eighth seed in the Midwest bracket. The Aggies will face the ninth seed Washington, who were the regular season PAC-12 champions.

“We’re so excited to represent Utah State the right way and obviously the Mountain West Conference in a first-class fashion,” USU head coach Craig Smith said, following the announcement. Aggies junior guard Sam Merrill, the Mountain West tournament MVP and regular season conference Player of the Year added that they are “very excited to have helped bring Utah State basketball

back to where it needs to be.”

This season will be the first time in program history that the team will be the chalk favorites in an NCAA Tournament game. The highest seed USU has received since seeding numbers began being assigned in 1980 is 10 (three times).

The fact that this iteration of the Aggies made history by doing something no Aggie squad, even the legendary Stew Morrill-led teams, ever managed was not lost on Smith or its star player Sam Merrill (Both mentioned it in their opening statements to the media). That didn’t change the level of disbelief based on where this team started in November.

“This has been like a fairy tale, quite frankly,” Smith said of the season.

“It’s incredible,” Merrill said. “I never would have thought we’d be at this point with how my first couple years (at Utah State) went. But, just how we’ve grown as a team and how each player individually has grown, it’s been an incredible ride.”

From 2002 to 2011, Utah State made six tournament appearances, though they lost in each of those matchups and were never higher than an 11 seed (2009). The last win in the famed March tournament came in 2001 when Morrill, in just his third season as the



PHOTO BY Savy Knapp

Utah State's Brock Miller dribbles during Utah State's 91-83 victory over New Mexico in the MWC Tournament first round on March 14.

USU head coach, led the Aggies to a 77-68 upset in overtime against fifth seed Ohio State.

“I don’t remember (the last USU tournament win), I was probably four or five,” Merrill said. “But I do remember all the losses throughout the next few years. And those were really good Utah State teams that just, for some reason or another, couldn’t find a way to get over that hump but we’re hoping to be that team that can do that and make some noise for our program.”

Getting into the tournament was not in question after the Aggies made their bid official with a 64-57 win over San Diego State in the championship game of the conference tournament. The question then became: how high will that seed be? In the end, the players appeared satisfied.

“We wanted the best seed that we could get,” Merrill said, “Getting an eight seed was awesome.”

Tip-off for the game will be at 4:50 p.m. MST Friday night, and it will air on TNT as well as KBLU-LP 92.3 FM.



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