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5500 CAMPANILE DRIVE, SAN DIEGO, CA 92182 | (619) 594-5547

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San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes Tuesday, Oct. 23, 2018

Head Coach Rocky Long

Opening statement:

"We're right in the thick of the conference race right now. I mean, there are some teams that have an opportunity to win their (division) and get into the championship game. We are one of those teams, so is Nevada. So it's a critical game for both teams this week and Nevada's hot right now. They're playing really, really well. They've done a good job up there coaching because they've recruited well. They've got a really good quarterback (Ty Gangi) who is playing a high (level). So it's going to be a very difficult situation going up there and having a chance to win.

On where his team stands right now:

"I think our team is very young and inconsistent, and we've been very fortunate to win the games that we've won."

On the similarities of Nevada's defense to the Aztecs:

"The only thing that is similar is that we have three down linemen, three linebackers and five DBs. The way we run that system is completely different. They don't even look the same on film.

"They are little bit more standing in a 3-3-5. Now they do move around and do some things but if you watch us play, very seldom do we line up in a 3-3-5. We have a lot of four-man fronts, we have a lot of five-man fronts. Now they have a lot of three-man fronts with three linebackers. That's not where they end up. But they look like a 3-3-5 defense when they originally line up; we don't hardly ever because we have so many different fronts that we play."

On why Nevada's defense has improved:

"They've got better players that understand their system and are playing at a lot better rate."

On if his team is still fatigued from such a big win at Boise State three games ago:

"Well, we haven't played very well the last two weeks if that's what you mean. I don't know about being fatigued. I think that when you have as young a team as we do — I think we played [15] freshmen or redshirt freshmen last week — they're not used to playing at this level of competition against this kind of size and speed and experience and sometimes that's a fatiguing factor, if not physically it is mentally. I mean, it's like being a freshman in high school and they're playing against the varsity. I mean, they're at a huge disadvantage physically and over games, they get worn out quicker than a more experienced guys who have lifted weights and have been in our program for three years. They're used to that kind of grind. Young players are not used to that kind of grind."

On the emergence of Nevada quarterback Ty Gangi:

"Well I thought he was really good last year, too. And if you look at our game against them last year, they moved the ball really, really well and threw the ball really, really well. So he's as good or better than he was last year and obviously he's made them a lot better. Now he's probably a lot more comfortable this year than he was last year because he's used to their system. Last year, he was getting used to the system and this year he understands the system, so he's playing very, very well. They've moved the ball on everybody and they've scored a lot of points."

On if the secondary is up to the challenge at this point in the season:

"Well I would have thought that. The hope was after we played Boise that we had put all those problems behind us, but I don't think so. They popped up again last week. So I think that we played an extraordinary game that one day and we haven't been that good or that consistent since that one game. Now if you can tell me how to get them to play at that level again, I'll pay you a lot of money."

On if the team is playing up or down to the level of competition:

"I don't think so. I think you're on the right track. This is just me guessing because I don't know. I don't know when they're going to play well and when they're not going to play well or when they're not going to be into the game. I haven't ever known. I mean, it's not just this group of kids; I have never known. I think we're more on the right track that we're playing so many young who aren't used to this kind of competition week after week after week after week. When you have a junior and senior (laden) team, they are very used to it and very experienced handling that, just like a five- and six-year NFL player as compared to a rookie NFL player. Rookie NFL players hit the wall about halfway through season because they're not used to the grind and playing against that kind of competition week in and week out. I think that's more our case than the other. I think our young players aren't used to playing against that kind of competition and they might've hit the wall a bit, and the trouble is that with injuries, more and more of them are playing."

On Nevada's offense:

"They're very good on offense and they've been really good the last three weeks against some pretty good teams. The beat up on Hawai'i last week and Hawai'i was tied with everybody else at 3-0 in conference and fighting for the championship. Hawai'i is still fighting, but Nevada went (there) and beat them up pretty good. So I think Nevada's hot right now. I think they've got a lot of momentum on their side and they're hot."

"They've really improved their running game. They have the running back they had last year (Kelton Moore) back and have two new running backs (Toa Taua, Devonte Lee) who are very good. They're a lot like the running backs we've had in the past or like we have now. They're not very tall, but they're big and they've got good quickness and they can break tackles and all those kinds of things. They play three of them, so they stay pretty fresh."

On Nevada scoring only three points against Fresno State:

"Their quarterback was not playing. Nevada's quarterback did not play; (it) had nothing to do with Fresno State."

On his program not receiving a top-25 ranking despite a 6-1 record:

"We don't deserve to be in the top 25. We (haven't played) good enough to be in the top 25."

On the team's running back situation:

"I think what you'll see (vs. Nevada) is what you saw last week. A bunch of running backs are going to get a chance. Coach (Jeff) Horton does a great job with them and he designs certain plays that work better for them and their abilities, so they'll all get a chance and we're looking for the hot hand. Last week, it was Chance Bell. I don't think going into the game we expected him to carry the ball so much. But he looked good doing it, so he got to carry the ball a lot more. I think that's what we are, I think

we're a running back by committee right now and whoever's got the hot hand will get more of the carries. Now hopefully we're going to get Juwan back here pretty quick and then we've got a starting running back."

On the status of quarterback Christian Chapman:

"He has been cleared as an emergency. That means if all the other quarterbacks get hurt, he'll go in there and take a snap and hand it to the running back ... I think he's a lot closer (to playing) than he was. But as a coaching staff, we're not going to put him out there until we see in practice that he can protect himself. Now if you promise that no one will hit him, he could play right now because he can hand it off and he's throwing it well. He's really throwing it well. But we do one little drill at the end of practice on Tuesdays and Wednesdays where the quarterbacks don't get hit, but they get a pass rush and you can just tell if a guy comes clean he's not going to get out of the way."

On the play of the offensive line:

"I think they've been inconsistent. They've been like our whole team and going into the season, I thought they would they would be one of our more consistent factors. But they've been very inconsistent in their play."

On the play of quarterback Ryan Agnew:

"I think that Ryan has played well and in critical times and very close games—that's all we play are close games—he's made a lot of big plays to help us win the game. That's a pretty good quarterback if you ask me."

On if he feels the defensive line is physically dominant giving up just 2.4 yards per rush:

"I don't think they're physically dominant. I think some it has to do with kind of offenses that we've played against. Other than the first game (at Stanford) where I thought we played really, really good against the run, we've been very average against the run. The only team that has tried to run it at us consistently was Air Force ... The rest of the (opponents) are spread teams, so if they cannot run the ball and get six or seven yards a carry, they're not going to run it. They're going to throw it or they're going to throw screens or bubble screens, which are just like runs. So we're not even close to being dominant up front. Now what we've done is we've played one really good running team very, very well and that was the first game of the year and we lost. So I'd rather have it the other way where don't play that very well and we still win."

On what he is expecting from Nevada's defense:

"I expect them to put a whole bunch of guys, even though they're in a 3-3-5, close to the line of scrimmage, try to make us throw it and see if we can throw it. That's what everybody does. I don't know why they would be different. I hope they (are). I hope they back off and play really soft and let us run the ball."

On placekicker John Baron II:

"His ability to make big-time kicks in a pressure situation is probably better than (anyone) I've been around personally ... If someone doesn't pay him a lot of money, they're not very smart because I see kickers in the NFL missing extra points."

Junior tight end Parker Houston

On if the game is special because of the proximity to his hometown of Sparks, Nevada:

"Yeah, it's kind of like a homecoming for me. It's always fun to play in my home against a team that's doing really good this year; they're really hot. To have all my friends and family be able to come out and support and not have to take a very a long trip is pretty nice."

On if he went to Nevada games as a kid:

"Of course, yeah. I was at the UNR-Boise one (in 2010) where Boise missed the field goals and everybody rushed the field."

On transition from playing at the collegiate level compared to college:

"It's tough for any young guys. The whole transition, you're hit with your first semester of college. You got a lot of school work, you got all the lifting we do, all the practice we have, all the games. It takes a wear and tear on your body, but at some point they'll figure it out. They'll be able to handle both school and athletics and we'll just keep on rolling. We'll get rid of that inconsistency within our team."

On playing at altitude in Nevada:

"It's kind of like the Boise State question: what's it like playing on a blue field? It's just a different environment. We'll adjust to it, we'll prepare for it this week."

On the team not receiving a top-25 ranking despite six straight wins:

"That's fine, we'll prove them wrong."

On if he has any family that went to the University of Nevada:

"Yeah, all my family up there. My two sets of grandparents, all my aunts and uncles. I actually have an aunt that currently works there and I have an uncle that does a lot of stuff for the basketball team stat-wise, so they'll have to trade in their navy and silver for some red and black this week. They will do it willingly."

On why he chose San Diego State:

"The environment that these coaches have built here over the last couple of years and just that winning-ness that this program has. I feel like I'm at home, I really do. I see my parents every weekend, they love traveling to games, but my teammates have made it a huge family for me. I always have brothers here and there and I couldn't ask for a better coaching staff."

On any sense of Nevada as a first choice for football:

"No, no. I mean, it would have been cool to just stay home and play for the hometown team, but I'm glad I came here. I wouldn't have a championship ring if I didn't. I wouldn't have all the friends I've made. It would be a totally different situation."

On if Nevada recruited him:

"No. The coach said I was too short. Apparently, he thought the same of Tyler Roemer and look at what we're doing now. Roemer is being picked to be preseason all-American. The kid's a stud. I'm fitting in well."

On the team's mentality traveling to Nevada:

"For us, this is a business trip. This isn't something to have fun with. We're there for a game, to win a game."

Senior defensive tackle Noble Hall

On playing consistent:

"I believe because we have a lot of young guys on the team that don't have too much playing experience. The old guys that are on the team, we're trying to give them all the experience we know, but I would say it's a lack of game-time experience that we need."

On playing with a cast:

"I might have it on one last week just to be safe. I've been having fun with it also so why not have fun with it for another week. Before I first played with it, I thought I would have a hard time playing with it, but after the first week I felt like I was pretty dominant with it and also the next week and this past game. It hasn't really caused me too many problems just besides grabbing and not having my fingers, but I've been able to compensate for that."

On Nevada's offense:

"Their quarterback gets the ball to the points where the wide receiver is. They have great wide receivers. The running backs are probably going to be the toughest running backs that we play this year. We can't come out slow like we did last game. Coach Long, he's going to get us ready. We just have to execute."

On Nevada's ability to put in fresh running backs:

"That doesn't affect us. Especially as a front seven, we just get after it. We hit our points and that's why our rush defense is what it is."

On the team's mentality traveling to Nevada:

"The coaches make sure that we're not lollygagging and playing around. They want the whole vibe, all the days of the trip to be just straight football. No playing around, we're playing to win."

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