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San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes

Tuesday, Nov. 6, 2018

Fowler Athletics Center

Head Coach Rocky Long

Opening statement:

"We're moving along with the same scenario week-to-week-to-week, so I'm assuming that this (game) will be exactly the same. A team (UNLV) coming in here with some very talented athletes (that) causes you a lot of issues. They average almost 30 points a game and gain about 400 yards a game. And supposedly we're the favorite, but that doesn't mean anything. It's going to be a close game and we'll see if we can win it at the end."

On if these close games have built character on the team:

"I think that they're close games 'cause we're very inconsistent. What they do do is play hard and they play hard 'til the very end. We've been fairly lucky that we've made a play or two to win the game."

"I don't think we're uncomfortable late in a game when it's close. If a team is good enough that they're not in that situation very often, sometimes they don't react right. I think our guys would feel weird if it wasn't like that at the end of a game."

On placekicker John Baron landing on the semifinal list for the Lou Groza Award:

"It doesn't surprise me; he deserves to be on that list. I don't know who exactly he's competing against ... When things are easy, he's liable to miss one, but when things are critical, he doesn't miss. He makes most of them anyway. I think he has the ability to concentrate in stressful situations. Good players are able to do that. He actually performs better in those situations than he does when it's not stressful or there's no pressure."

On if he thinks John Baron will be an NFL Draft choice:

"I think he has a chance to be drafted late, but he would be better off not being drafted because he's going to have four or five teams fighting over him if he's a free agent."

On if he thinks kickers have too much influence over the outcome of a game:

"No, I think it makes the game more exciting. When a kicker misses or gets one blocked, it makes a huge difference in a game, just like it did last week."

On if UNLV's six-game losing streak will make them more dangerous because they'll be able to play loose:

"I think they play for the fun of the game and anytime you play just for the fun of the game, you have a much better chance to perform well. I think this is part of the reason coaches sometimes affect their team the wrong way. I think whenever you're in a winning program like we are and whenever you win games at a pretty good clip, all of a sudden some of the fun of playing

leaves because of the outside influences and the coaching influences that start making the game a lot more important than it really is. Players hear that and they see that. I think at times it takes some of the fun out of playing. That's really sad. But you get to a point in every season where you're able to play just for the fun of the game, and players usually perform much better that way than they do the other way."

On the perceived inability of some teams in the Mountain West to keep pace with other teams in the league:

"I think every conference has the exact same issues. You go to every single conference and they have programs that are consistent winners, and then they have programs that will win every once in a while, and they have programs that for the longest time have not won. It doesn't matter what conference you're in. Some programs never lose a game or don't seem like they ever lose a game. Then there are other teams in that same league that have struggled to win a game. It seems like they're the same teams every year."

On the return of Christian Chapman in last Saturday's victory at New Mexico:

"We were pleasantly surprised that he performed so well. I think he'll even tell you that he was a little nervous at the beginning, but when the first pass you throw is right on the money and goes for a pretty good gain, you get over that feeling pretty darn quick. I thought he played really, really well. It's good to have all those (injured) guys back. I think they make a difference and I think they'll make a difference for the rest of the year."

On if Juwan Washington was a little timid or rusty after coming back from injury last Saturday:

"I don't think he was timid, I think he was rusty. He told me his mind was working faster than his feet. There were a couple of spots where he slipped and fell down because he cut off the wrong foot. That's obviously rust. But he hit a couple of them and he scored touchdowns in situations that we haven't been scoring touchdowns in since he's been out. I think he'll be much, much better this week."

On the recruiting and development of fullbacks:

"You cannot find fullbacks anymore ... They could be tight ends that are on your campus now, they could be linebackers. They could be high school tailbacks that aren't quite fast enough but can get big enough and are willing to be the blocker instead of the ball carrier. You have to develop fullbacks. If you want to have a fullback, you have to pick them from some other position and develop them. Our two fullbacks, one was a linebacker (Isaac Lessard) and one was a running back (Chad Woolsey)."

On how the quarterbacks will rotate against UNLV:

"I will leave that up to coach (Jeff) Horton. I know the plan is for Christian to start; Ryan's going to come in for a series like Christian did (at New Mexico), and I have great confidence that coach Horton is going to put the quarterback back in there who's playing the best."

On the emergence of tight end Kahale Warring over the last two weeks:

"I think Kahale is still a little a bit of a novice football player 'cause he hasn't played very much. He gets a little bit better every week; he's actually improved his blocking. But he is an outstanding big athlete. He's 6-6, 250 pounds, runs fast and has great hands. So he is a matchup problem for anybody. Then our offense has done a really good job with play-action passing where sometimes he just slips out there in the open and nobody covers him and he catches the ball. He's had a big influence on the offensive success that we've had. He had a touchdown (reception) last week that was called back ... He's got a lot of athletic ability with size and strength and speed, and he's becoming a better football player daily."

On installing Garrett Binkley as a punt returner at New Mexico:

"I hope that we have found somebody who has solved our problems because that was a big issue with our team leading up to that game, and Bink did a great job of catching the ball, number one. We just wanted a guy out there who could catch the ball consistently, not let it roll down to the one-yard line or drop it. Well, he did that and he gave us a bonus (with his return yardage).

So he actually can run with the ball once he catches it if the guys out there work hard enough and block some people and give the guy a chance. I thought that was the biggest positive of our team last week, catching punts and being able to return a punt. I thought that was the biggest improvement that we made. So hopefully that is a problem solved and we can work on the other problems that we have."

Junior linebacker Kyahva Tezino

On winning the Mountain West Defensive Player of the Week award:

"It's great. It's good for me to just be able to make plays for the team. I guess I'm starting to be a regular, but I'm still not used to it. I'm still happy about every little thing I get so I'm just excited and I can't wait to see what happens at the end of the season, and to see if we make it to the championship."

On coaches being surprised at how well he performed since taking over the starting role:

"I always had faith in myself, knowing what I can do. Like I said before, I don't know if the coaches saw it, but I'd rather have it the way it went so I'm not really worried. I'm just happy it's happening now rather than later. I'm just enjoying the ride right now, I'm just enjoying everything about it."

On working against fullback Isaac Lessard in practice:

"We always bump heads during spring ball and (fall) camp. (Lessard) and Dakota Gordon are both the kind of guys that always give me a headache. Isaac is a good blocker as you guys can see."

On if the UNLV games is any more meaningful than any other game:

"I think we just need to win every game from here on out. Obviously like coach Long says, our team has been going through adversity this whole year and it's always going to be a close game for us. We're not going to fight it anymore, it's just going to be the way it is. The way we train, we're mentally tough and we've been pulling out at the end and getting the win. If we can just keep doing that and make it to the championship, then we've reached our goal."

On the importance of causing turnovers and getting the offense the ball:

"We still have to be better as a defensive whole. Our goal is to get a shutout and we still haven't had a shutout yet this season. So once we do that, we'll reach our goal as a defense. Once we can create more turnovers for the offense so they can get the ball and put some points on the board then our defense will be efficient. As it's going, we can only get better and better."

On the offense fumbling and giving the opponent good field position:

"The fumbles don't really matter to us. Guys make mistakes. As a defense, we play our role. We go out and help out our teammates. When one person's down, we need to help pick them back up. If he fumbles, we'll go back and help him out. Like we did (at New Mexico), we only held them to three points a couple times so."

Junior fullback Isaac Lessard

On his experience playing fullback:

"It's pretty hard to recruit a fullback now just because it's kind of a dying breed. For me, personally, I've played linebacker and I've played rugby growing up so I've never been afraid to hit. So that transition as far as the physicalness of the position, I think I was able to fit right in. As far as technique and blocking, all that, that's just learning from the guys in front of me like Nick Bawden and Dakota Gordon when I first got here, and just learning from coach Horton all the techniques."

On working against linebacker Kyahva Tezino in practice:

"I always knew Kyahva would be a great linebacker just from hitting him. He's a hard hitter, always coming full speed downhill. I knew he'd be great."

On feelings toward coming in as a linebacker and transitioning to fullback:

"I was excited. I came in as a linebacker and coach Arnett and coach Horton had a meeting with me and told me about the switch, and I was excited. I was just excited to get back on the offensive side of the ball. I think I just have a better mind for that side."

On if he enjoys being linebacker or fullback more:

"I like fullback. I like being on offense. I just think my mind works better that way. Obviously, I don't score the touchdowns, but I like opening up the holes for the running backs and the receivers to score the touchdowns. I have more fun on offense."

On Nick Bawden being an inspiration:

"Yeah, definitely. I think the thing I learned most from Bawden is the mindset to be a fullback. He was obviously a quarterback so he kind of had to teach himself how to prepare every day the right way to just get right mentally to endure that physical battle that you have to do. That's what I've learned most from him, and that's kind of what you just have to do - kind of trick yourself into loving the position."

On the thrill of being back on the field:

"It's awesome. The last game, our last touchdown was a toss and I came up in between the blocking linemen and I just saw me and one guy I was like, 'I know (running back) Juwan (Washington) is going to break this because I'm going to get him. Once I blocked him and saw Juwan break free, I was excited."

On if Juwan Washington thanked him after the touchdown:

"He gives everyone his props. He's a humble guy. He talks to us and the (offensive) linemen all the time."

On the return of Juwan Washington and Christian Chapman:

"It was awesome. It just brings more bodies and more competition to practice. It's awesome to just get the whole group back together."

On how it felt to play last weekend:

"So much fun. It's hard not being out there with the guys. You train all off-season with the guys and they become your brothers. That's who you want to battle with so when you're not able to be out there and fight with them it's pretty tough. Getting out there last Saturday was awesome. It was a great feeling."

On the team's goal for the season:

"Our goal is to win championship No. 22 and right now we control our own destiny because if we win every game, we'll be able to make it to the championship. Every game is a must-win so it doesn't matter who's in front of us right now."

On his faith in the team:

"Yeah, I always feel confident in our group of guys. (It) doesn't really matter the score or what time it is in the game, I know we're going to pull it out. I don't always know how we're going to do it, but I always know we'll get the job done eventually and we'll come out on top."

On the fumbles by the running backs last week vs. New Mexico:

"We pride ourselves on taking care of the football, especially in the running back room. We can't turn over the ball, we know that, we talk about it every day. So that's on us. As an offense, we're still working on being consistent. We're coming out every day and working on that. Just trying to be better as a group. (The) defense has done a great job at holding us in games all year. We need to give them a lot of credit. In our room, we've got five fumbles. That's the most any group under Coach Horton has had for a full year, so we can't turn over the ball anymore."

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