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SDSU Men's Basketball vs. Cal State Dominguez Hills – Preview Quotes

Dec. 11, 2018

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening statement:

"Happy holidays, everyone. Excited to get back on the floor tomorrow and see if we can't keep improving this team. There's never any good out of a loss; as a coach, it's hard to find. With that being said, I thought offensively against Cal we played pretty good. We shot in the high 50s from the field, close to 60 from the three, 80 from the foul line, and we scored 83 points, but it's hard to take any solace in that when you give up 89 and lose the game. So, we continue to work on things that we need to do to improve as a team. Obviously, the emphasis this week will continue to be defense and rebounding. We had a seven or eight-point lead late and it was an offensive rebound that started the tide turning the other way – an offensive rebound kick out for a three, which happens at a lot of games, but when it happens to you it's always tough. So, we've known rebounding is an Achilles heel of ours and we continue to work on it and we'll hopefully see improvement as the season goes on in that regard."

On Aztecs needing practice:

"If we were in Nevada and playing at a high, high level right now, we'd want more games, but where we're at as a team right now, we need the practice time. So, I welcome the chance to, after tomorrow's game, have 10 days to try and get the team better in a lot of areas. That's the beauty of basketball. It's a long season. There's time to grow and I have a team that buys in. I like going to work with them every day. Sure, we wish we'd win, but they want to learn, too. They want to be taught and that's what we are; coaches are teachers. So, we continue to teach and hopefully those teaching sessions will improve the results that we all want."

On if there's any loss that hurts the most:

"I think obviously Cal was tough because we had a lead with under five minutes to go. We played well offensively, we shared the ball and had 18 assists and played pretty well offensively. That was the one that was tough. We knew the other games were going to be tough. At Illinois State it was a tough challenge, we got that one. USD, like I saw in the paper today, they're having their best start ever, so we knew they were very good and then to try to bounce back after that game with the Cal game – and I thought, if you're a fan of basketball, it was a great game to watch. I think there were [20] lead changes, but when you're a coach, it's tough to take. We have to continue to improve our team. We know we have to get better at things. The kids know that and we continue to work hard every day in practice to improve ourselves daily."

On how hard it is to fast-forward the progress of young kids:

"Well, it's obviously been hard for me because at Cal, I didn't play my bench the minutes they probably should have played. Aguek Arop only played about a minute. Nathan Mensah played well in the first half – I think he had six points and was doing well, but in a

tough road environment I must have believed in my own mind that he wasn't up for the task in the second half and I played small again with Adam Seiko. With that being said, you build an eight-point lead, so you look back and the best sight is always hindsight, so you look back and say, 'Well, maybe I should have played Nathan more down the stretch.' I didn't, but that doesn't mean he's not ready for those minutes and hopefully over this next stretch of four games leading to our conference season I will continue to get him on the floor and some of the other freshman and let them feel more comfortable moving into the conference season."

On toughest position to play in basketball:

"I think sometimes the center position is the hardest one because you're the anchor behind everybody. So, someone makes a mistake out in front of you, you have to come over and erase that mistake with a blocked shot or you have to stop the ball. College basketball is so much about ball screens now and most teams will screen with that five-man and you have to come up and call out where that screen is coming from, where you want to send the offensive player, defensively, if you want to send them down the base line or if you want to play him to the middle. So, the center position, I think in a large degree, is the hardest one to play in basketball. We're playing Jalen (McDaniels) there for the first time in the starting lineup and Matt Mitchell sometimes. So they're having to call out stuff and when I come with Nathan Mensah as a freshman missing a month of practice, he's a little bit behind the curve on communication. Nolan Narain's done a god job, but obviously he missed Illinois State because of illness and now he's working his way back. I've got a lot of good players and a lot of choices. I just got to keep trying to get them better because they want to be taught and they want to learn. I think their best basketball is definitely ahead of them."

On expectations against Dominguez Hills:

"Obviously, we want to defend at a higher level. They're going to present issues. They do a good job: they weave the ball and they drive it and they spread it out. They're well-coached and they do a lot of things well, so we ought to make sure we can contain that ball and keep it out of the paint. Obviously, we want to rebound better. We worked hard on rebounding yesterday; every position to the possession to the brutal end, till we had the ball or it was knocked out of bounds or it was rebounded by somebody. We went pretty hard yesterday and really emphasized that and we've been emphasizing that. We know that's a weakness, so it's something that we work on daily to try to improve."

On the challenges of playing teams who play a five-out, more modern type of basketball:

"Everyone's playing a spread floor now. Cal presented problems because they switched their lineup up and all of a sudden instead of a five-man that would roll to the basket and wasn't a threat from three, they put a three-point shooter at the five-man position. They made that switch at game time and it affected us. We had to change our game plan and we made two or three adjustments. We first, started the play trying to send the ball down to the baseline, the big play back and then once their five man started picking and popping, we tried to get up and get through and be there on the catch. Then at the end, we switched five, we switched every ball screen. We tried to adjust as the game went on but every game is different. You try to take away what the other team does, the best thing they do, and then adjust along the way. I thought our kids did a good job adjusting, but at the end, because we were switching ball screens we gave up offensive rebounds. I think the big one, Jeremy (Hemsley) ended up on their center down low and we got the stop — the defensive game plan worked, but then it was a five-man rebounding against a guard and he just reached over and got it. Jeremy tried, but it was as much of a game-plan adjustment that we made, that they took advantage of with an offensive rebound. You're always adjusting. You're always looking to put your team in the best position to win. I thought our adjustments were good; it's just they made a couple plays down the stretch that hurt us, obviously."

On the team's chemistry, effort and leadership at this point in the season:

"Yeah. They are working hard. You have to realize, this is a team — the veterans went through this last year where it was a struggle early and they stayed with it and got it together late, and played their best basketball late. Every season is different. I don't want that

to be the case this year. I'd like to start playing well tomorrow and go on a nice win streak into the conference season. But, every team has its different rhythm and way of going about maturing, and we'll see how this team responds to adversity. I know how the coaches will respond: we'll stay the course, we'll teach the right things, we'll stay on them, we'll demand excellence, but we won't go Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. We won't be all happy with them when they win, and screaming and yelling at them when they lose. We'll deliver a consistent message that we think will get the best out of them."

On if he will approach the next couple weeks of practice with more scrimmages or fundamentals:

"It will be a mix of both. Obviously, we have to work on fundamentals, but sometimes when we've worked on the fundamentals, we have to do them at a game pace. It is one thing to do a drill and everybody kind of knows where they're supposed to be in a drill. Then, the hard part is when you move it to a game tempo and you're playing in a game, is to do it in the game. We'll continue to teach, but I think we need to go up and down and go at each other a little more, and respond to that kind of adversity where you're going against each other in a live situation, and see who can make the plays at a game tempo. Teaching-wise, they're working hard and trying to learn the right things, and now, they have to translate it to a game situation."

On the number of minutes Devin Watson has seen per game this season and if it will continue:

"Too many. I'm playing those guys too many minutes. It is one thing if it's the first game after two or three days off, but that was the third game in seven days and I'm playing him [36] minutes. That's too many. I know that. Devin is obviously going to get the most minutes, but the other guys need to play as hard as they can, and I need to give them rest because they are putting everything into it. I think when you watch us play, I don't think anyone ever says we're not playing hard. We make mistakes, and maybe some of those mistakes are made because of tired legs at the end. I don't think it's a matter of attitude or desire or wanting to win and putting everything into it. I've got a great group in that regard. They compete to the brutal end of every game. And, that's whether we are up 20 and competing at a high level, or down to Duke and just continuing to battle. I think these kids battle all the way through."