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San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes

Monday, Dec. 3, 2018

Fowler Athletics Center

Head Coach Rocky Long

Opening statement:

"It's nice to have this today because that means we're in a bowl game. Going into the weekend we weren't sure we were going to be in one. We were hoping and we thought we were going to be, but we got a bowl bid. We're excited and it gives us some extra practice time. It lets our team and the seniors especially play one more game before their college career is over. We did not care where we went, but going to Texas is kind of a fun deal. I think we have 10 Texans on our team, so it's really fun for them. But for the rest of the guys, they'll be happy about going, too."

On the coaching matchup between him and Ohio's Frank Solich:

"I don't know if it's old-school football, but the two coaches are old. Since coach (Bill) Snyder retired at Kansas State, I think Solich is the oldest guy coaching Division I football right now. I'm right up there close to him. We're in the top three, so the two of us coaching in the same bowl game is probably going to set a record for total age. That's ok since I'm the younger one of the two."

On the players getting bowl game experience for next year's team:

"I think for next year's team, the added practices really are a positive. We're in the process of evaluating our program. There are some things that we've had in the past that maybe we don't have right now and have to re-instill in our team. We get to start on that today rather than waiting until the offseason, which wouldn't be until January 20th or something like that when we start offseason workouts. We get to start today and we get to do it for maybe about a week-and-a-half, then go totally into getting ready for the football game that they get to play."

On if he was surprised the team received a bowl berth despite losing its last three games:

"I don't think it has anything to do with the last three games of the season. I think it has to do with overall record and the rules state if you win six games, you're bowl eligible. We've won seven, so we're bowl eligible. There were some people out there who thought we were deserving of a bowl game, so we got a bowl bid."

On what made his team desirable for an at-large bowl invitation:

"I think there are a couple of things. The reputation that the football program has built over the last eight or nine years, I think people have recognized that. I think there are more people in the country who recognize our brand and that we have a good football team here, so that makes (us) more attractive. I think since we're coming from San Diego, the population and the number of TV sets makes us more attractive. There are a lot of reasons that people will move you to an at-large spot. Sometimes you bring value to the TV market and some if it has to do with our record over the last nine years or so. But I think we're a very

attractive bowl team. I think our league, our commissioner did a nice job of making sure most of us got into a bowl game when there were more bowl-eligible teams than automatic spots."

On if he has started thinking about preparations to face Ohio:

"Yeah, I've spent all morning watching them on film. All you have to do is look at their stats and what the stats show is exactly who they are. They're a really good football team that prides themselves on being able to run ball on everybody. They score a lot of points and they don't give up many. In fact, their losses were really close games. But if you want to look at their last three games, that's what's most impressive. They lost by two points (30-28) in their big rivalry game (at Miami (OH)) and they won the last two by a whole bunch of points. They scored [52] points and won the game against Buffalo, who was actually in the MAC Championship game last [Friday] ... So that shows you how good a football team they are."

On the type of offense Ohio runs:

"They're a spread team that runs zone read. They run some speed option, but not triple option. They're in the spread, but they run a lot of zone reads in there. They're big and strong up front and block very, very well and they've got a couple of good running backs. Then if you (put) too many people on the running backs or stop that part of the run, the quarterback (Nathan Rourke) is very good at running the ball. He's got [816] yards rushing himself. The team has over 3,000 yards rushing. One of the backs (A.J. Oullette) has [1,142] yards and another one (Maleek Irons) has [831] yards ... That's a lot of rushing right there with three backs and the zone read play allows the quarterback to give it to the right guy. He either carries it himself or he gives it to the running back by what you do on defense. It's not near as complicated as the triple option, but it's very effective."

On whether his defense has experience facing the type of offense Ohio runs:

"Yeah, they have experience. The offense that Ohio runs is very similar to several of the offenses we've seen so far this year. They just emphasize the running game more and they're much better at it, so the scout team will be fine. They go off of cards anyway, so they'll be fine. They've run (against) some of those plays before."

On what the quarterback rotation will be against Ohio:

"We haven't even thought about that yet. We're going to practice today, but most of it's practice for us. Most of this practice for this whole week will be for us, not getting ready for Ohio."

On how much pride in the program he has with the team earning a bowl berth once again this year:

"For the sake of the players in our program and for the sake of recruiting and for the sake of developing next year's team, it's very, very important we're in a bowl game. Our players will have a good time; they'll have fun and that's a nice pat on the back for winning enough games to get in a bowl game, but personally I'm very disappointed on how the season ended. But we're not approaching the bowl game as part of this season. We're approaching the bowl game as a one-game season."

On if he expects the team to be healthy in time for the bowl game:

"We'll see how they get through practice. Practice is not going to be like you practice as the season goes along (when) you start backing off on how much physical work you do. The first week-and-a-half of this practice is going to be like spring practice, so there might be several of them who get banged up in practice."

On what is the one area he would like to see the most improvement for the one-game season:

"That we are able to run the football ... We have played quite a few teams from the MAC in the past; they're all the same. They are very physical and they are very tough football teams. They don't try to trick you; they don't surprise you, they just line up and play ball. So we're going to have to be better than we were at the line of scrimmage in order to run the football. Hopefully in the next week or so in practice, we'll get better at doing that."

On if he's still a proponent of the early signing period for recruits:

"Yeah, I'm still for it, but I've heard other coaches complain about it because it goes right through bowl season. In fact, the signing date (Dec. 19) is the same day that we play. So the guys who have committed to us — and hopefully we might get one or two more — hopefully they sign early in the morning so we get a copy of their signed letter of intent before we actually go to the pregame meal."

On if he knows Ohio head coach Frank Solich personally:

"Yeah, a little bit. I mean, we're not friends. We've bumped into each other over the years. It was really interesting to me that coach Snyder (retired) yesterday and now Frank Solich is the oldest Division I coach, so there's only a couple more steps until I'm the oldest one."

"I thought he was a good coach all along. When Nebraska let him go, I thought Ohio was really smart to hire him and it's proven (to be) that way."

Junior tight end Parker Houston**On how the team will approach this game:**

"Coach Long said earlier that it's not part of this season; it's its own season in itself. We're going to come with everything we've got. We're going to play our hardest. We've got to send our seniors out the right way and we want to end with a win."

On receiving an invitation to play in the DXL Frisco Bowl:

"The way we finished our season, the way we were looking, I think everybody's just excited to get into a bowl game. It doesn't matter which one it is. We're just going to go out there and play our best."

On his reflections on the team's three-game losing streak to end the regular season:

"Personally it's kind of disappointing. Looking at the coaching staff and the players we have, this team should've been a lot better than it was. We're still looking to find out what happened, why we dropped off so much. I know the coaches take a lot of the blame for it, but for us players, we have to kind of look at ourselves and understand we're the ones who play the games, we're the ones who make the plays. A lot of it's on us. I know in meetings we had the other day, we talked about how we've got to get back to (what) Aztec football is and the smash-mouth football that we can play. We just have to bring that to this next game."

On the importance of getting to a bowl game every year and extending the season:

"It's nice for us a team. It's nice for the Mountain West Conference to have so many teams represented in bowl games. For us, it's another opportunity. My freshman year when we won the (MW) championship game and then we went to a bowl game, it was cool because we had won and it was just like, 'Let's go out there and give everything we've got; let's have fun with it.' (It's been) two years where we haven't won and especially this year where we haven't won a game in three weeks, it's just another chance for us to prove ourselves (and) show that we are a really good team. As soon as we get clicking, it should all change."

On why the team was unable to maintain the same success after beating Boise State:

"I think a lot of it has to do with teams figuring us out. On offense we're a team that likes to run the ball. We like to shove it down your throat and on defense we do really well against the run and we do really good against the pass. So I think teams really started playing to our weaknesses and it hindered us. As a team, you could feel something dropped off to where maybe this group of guys didn't care as much or it just seemed like we had a lot of misconception about what this was going to be and that kind of just took us down with it."

On whether the virtual bye-week will enable to the team to re-energize:

"I hope so. Like Kyahva said earlier, guys who are banged up, key people to our team, they're allowed to get healthy again. We get to rest, we get to catch up on our schoolwork, kind of relieve some stress off your shoulders, (which) kind of makes you play more freely. It is kind of like a bye-week, like a game-changer. Allows us to rest up; allows our coaches to regroup, kind of figure out what we've been doing wrong. In practice I'm sure we'll put emphasis on those weaknesses."

Junior linebacker Kyahva Tezino

On how whether it will be difficult to resume practicing after having a week off:

"Honestly, I've been so bored lately that I've been wanting to practice, so I think we're ready to go. I think if the guys were a little banged up there, they should be healed by now. I feel like our mindset coming in this week of practice should be to just give everything we've got."

On his reflections on the team's three-game losing streak to end the regular season:

"We wish we could have finished the season how we started. But this is a good opportunity for us to end (with) a win. That's our big thing. So hopefully we're going to bring a trophy home."

On receiving first-team all-Mountain West honors:

"I was very excited because just last year I wasn't playing as much and (then) this happened to me. It's just a real big deal for me. I can't thank God and my teammates and my coaches enough for this. But I wasn't really worried about it because that doesn't really define me. (My teammates) define me because I come to work for them every day, so if they're happy with what happens, then I'm happy, too."

On if he felt he should have earned the MW Defensive Player of the Year award:

"The guy who I looked up to the most about awards is Rashaad Penny. Last year, he should have won almost every award that could have been given and he was just so humble about it. So he made me feel like why should I worry about a trophy if he wasn't worried about the Doak Walker Award. I had a talk with him and he said that doesn't define you and you just got to continue to prove them wrong because there are always going to be politics around. So I just took that in mind and I'm just going to play this last game and hopefully (end) on the right note."

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