



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

GOAZTECS.COM | @GOAZTECS | @AZTECSPR | #GOAZTECS

SDSU Men's Basketball Preview Quotes – at Boise State January 3, 2019

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"Well, the conference season is here. Off to Boise we go. I feel pretty good about where the team is at. Obviously there's always work to be done. They call us coach, but they could easily call us teacher. There's a lot to be taught, and we continue to teach every day. The team is responding. I said in the last game, even though our numbers weren't great in the first half offensively against Northridge, the kids played the right way. They moved the ball the way I wanted them to. They missed some open looks and as a coach, part of your job is to keep your team from getting frustrated. I thought they did a good job of overcoming frustration. Whatever they might have had in the second half of that game when they found themselves 19 down, to stick with it, to continue to play the game the right way, to fight their way out of a monumental deficit – I mean, 19 down with 15 minutes to go is a big deficit to come back from. But, you see it in college basketball with the three-point shot, and the shot clock and the way the game is played, you can come back from deficits. I'm just so proud of the team with how they fought their way back and came out with a victory. Obviously it's not going to be as easy on the road; our home crown was critically important to our comeback. Now we have to go on a tough road environment and see if we can fight our way into a victory at Boise Saturday night."

On what he thinks of the "book" that is the different stories of the season thus far:

"That it's incomplete. We're writing a chapter every day. I plan a practice, and you can only be on the floor so long. There's a huge list of what you have to get better at, but you can't be out there four hours a day so you have to pick and choose where you're going to concentrate. Obviously we continue to concentrate on rebounding, boxing out, trying to not give teams second-chance opportunities. Offensively, it's always about sharing the ball. No matter what play we call, if you get two guys on you, you have to find that open man. To be an elite team, you have to find ways to pull two guys onto you, but when you do, move the ball in a timely manner. That always takes time. Defensively, it's trying to learn from your past experiences. As much as we work on the floor, there's no greater teacher than experience. When this happens next time, be ready for it. Every team plays different; there's always something new they have to deal with. If every team played the same way, you'd say, 'Okay, we're doing it again, we're doing it again, we're doing it again,' but all the sudden, you might play a team that runs a spread offense with no low post, and then the next game you might play a team with two low posts [who's] trying to beat you up physically, and then you'll go back to a team that really runs the baseline hard with a great shooter. You're teaching a new lesson every week depending on who you're playing, so you pick and choose the one or two things you to concentrate on and try to get better at that. With a veteran team, they've played two or three or four years and they've seen it all, so they go, 'Oh yeah, this is what New Mexico ran last year,' or, 'A year ago, yeah, this is what we saw from Boise, they're running the same stuff. We'll be ready for it.' But when you introduce four or five new freshmen to something new all the time, then it's a bit of a challenge to say they've seen it before, because they haven't."

On examining both the changes with defensive play and three-point shooting this season compared to years past:

"I hope the three-point shooting continues where it's at. We're shooting the ball at a really good pace right now. To beat Northridge, we had to make threes. Jeremy (Hemsley) hit one, (Adam) Seiko hit one, Devin Watson hit one, so they were from different players at critical times. Defensively, I think we will get better because we're working on it so hard, and I think it's [based on] a lot of experience. It's trying to get these guys up to a more consistent level every day they step on the floor. They're working hard at practice on it, but then it's [a matter of] translating it to the game. It's like offense, if one guy isn't playing the right way – in basketball, it's like you have five quarterbacks because everyone has the

ball in their hands. It's not like in football where the quarterback has it, and he's making all sorts of critical decisions as to where it goes, timing. In basketball, we throw it to Nathan Mensah at the foul line and he's the quarterback. He has to make the correct play and the right read. So on offense I have five quarterbacks, and if one makes a mistake, it affects the whole rhythm of the team. On defense, it's the same way. If one guy isn't up to speed with what we're doing, then four guys are constantly covering for one guy's mistakes. The critical nature of this is that everybody has to be a hand—five fingers on a hand—they all have to function to make it work. We continue to try to get all the new guys up to speed where we're not trying to cover up for some deficiencies they may have, just from a knowledge standpoint and doing it right."

On if the team is high and low or even keel:

"No, they come to work every day. They're not emotionally high and low. I think you see that on the floor. I don't think you see a lot of negative emotion when things aren't going well. What you see is Jeremy and Devin getting on them, and that's what seniors are supposed to do. What you learn as a senior is, you have to get on them the right way. You can't yell and scream at them, but you can challenge them. You can say, 'We're better than this, this is not what we are. This is who we are: our identity has always been defense. You have to hold your end. You have to be more accountable.' The seniors are preaching the coaches' message. When we're all preaching the same message, you would hope to see that improvement continue throughout the year."

On if he feels like the team has a "starting quarterback":

"I think, obviously, I want it in my seniors' hands at the end of the game. Devin is by far our leading assist guy. He's two or three-to-one assists to turnovers, so you want to put it in the guy's hands who's capable of not only scoring—which Devin is—but finding the open man when he draws two. Last year, that was Trey (Kell). If I ran a hundred ball screen plays for Trey, he'd probably pass it on 70 of them. You try to put it in the guy's hands that can score, but when he draws that second defender, he gets someone a wide-open shot. I think Devin and Jeremy, as seniors, are most capable of putting us in that position."

On what changes conference play brings to the season:

"Obviously with conference [play], you're familiar with your opponent. You're going against guys that, if you're a senior, you've played against for four years, so you know each other's games better. You know your opponent well. A lot of times, the system don't change a lot. Boise has always been a great four-out team, one in, ball screen, spread the floor, drive you, play the right way, kick the ball, and they're very good defensively. Our veterans know that, that have played against them. The task is for them to say, 'Here's what's going to happen at Boise. You guys have to understand this. This is what they're trying to do; this is what we have to take away.' So conference is always good because you're more familiar with your opponent, individually and collectively, when the coaching staffs are there for so long."

On if he notices player frustration any more this year than in years past:

"No, I think they've done a good job of managing their frustration. I don't think you see it a lot. Once in a while, as a coach you see it, it's not like anything more than maybe a kid will drop his head if something doesn't go right. And so, [with] that dropping of the head, 'Hey, we believe in you.' We have a next-play mentality. There's never been a perfect game played. The key is, when you make a mistake, don't linger on that mistake during the game because what will happen then is you'll make another one because you're still worried about the one you just made. We've always said, what we're doing in practice, we're teachers and that's the classroom. We're giving them all the answers in practice, and then when they get to the game, it's the test. I can't give you all the answers once the test is being taken. I can't pull you aside and say, 'Here's what the answer is now,' because then you're never into the game. You have to be into the rhythm of the game. There's plenty of time to teach after the game, and there's time to make adjustments during the game, but I can't give them the answers at that time. They have to go out there and just play, and if they make a mistake, don't worry about it at that time. Just go on and make the next play."

Senior Guard Jeremy Hemsley

On how he gauges inconsistencies the team has faced:

"I've said it before, it's really just up to the guys on the floor. The coaches—all they can do is just give us the answers and put us in the best position possible for us to win. I think that's something the guys on the court, the guys out there fighting, have to figure out. I think we've done a good job of it. I think it starts in practice. I think that's where games are won, in practice. We've just got to do a good job of just being consistent at practice. If you want to have consistent, good games and win games, then you've got to be good at practice. I think we're doing a better job of just trying to be better in that area."

On what the players on the floor can do to be successful:

"Just stick together. It's hard. It's never easy. It's never easy, so I think we've just got to stick together. It's a long season. It's conference now, so it's basically a new season. I think what's happened in the past has happened, and all we can do is look forward to being better and just trying to be the team that we know we are, and we know we are capable of being. Like I said, it's up to us. We've just got to stick together, no matter what happens. If we play bad or we play good, we can't get too high or too low."

On if there's a shift in mentality heading into conference play:

"Oh yeah, for sure. Going into conference [play], everybody knows your tendencies. Everybody knows what you like to do on the court, so you really have to step up and elevate your game in every way possible, and in every category. I think that's the challenge for all of us—to elevate our game—because we're going to be playing guys and going against coaches and players that know everything we like to do. Especially for the returners, the coaches have been on us, and the coaches for the opposing team have known us for the last however many years we've been here. It's definitely a shift in the mindset for sure."

On how the "book" that is the season is going to come together:

"It's still being written. It's still being written. We're not finished yet."

On if the CSUN game is a model of where the team is or where they need to be:

"I wouldn't say it's either. We have a lot of work to do in every category. The work never stops. Whether we play good or play bad, I don't think that's what we should base our season off of—one game. I think we've got to find the mistakes that we made in the game and got to find the things that we did good and just move on and try to take the positives from the game and implement that in the games that we play. I think the coaches do a good job of just staying with us. There's times where we may seem frustrated, and that's understandable, because we know what we're capable of. As a team and as a unit, we're our own biggest critics so we know what we have to do. We know, like I said, that it's up to us."

On the team chemistry right now:

"It's the same. Everybody loves each other. We hang out off the court all the time, and I think everybody always has a smile on their face. I don't think anybody is down or has that feeling like this is a bad season because it's not. We still have a lot of work to do and we're still capable of doing a lot of good things. If you think about the team we had last year, things didn't get good until the last nine games of the season. I really don't think this is a team you can count out. No matter what—the lead is never safe, whether we're down or not, no matter how bad it looks for us, I think we'll always find a way out."

On if it seems like the things SDSU has a reputation of excelling in has flipped:

"I don't see it that way, and I don't think any of my teammates or coaches see it that way. Like I said, we've just got to get better. It's a process. We've got to be on guys. We have two seniors on the team. When I say it's up to the guys on the court, I mean it's up to guys like me and Devin to set the tone. Guys who have been in the program and were here when [current Fresno State head coach Justin Hutson] was here and other guys—I was here when Winston (Shepard) and Skylar (Spencer) were here, so I know what the standard is and how to set the tone. If anybody has to do a better job, it's the seniors. Like I keep saying, it really is up to us. The coaches are doing everything that they can. None of us are in a panic mode. We're in a good space and we've just got to get better at practice because that's really where games are won, and that's what Dutch has been preaching to us every day."

Freshman Forward Nathan Mensah**On the consistency he sees at both practice and games:**

"I feel like you're reading a book, one chapter is really nice, one chapter is really bad, but you don't stop there. You try to finish the book and see what it leads to. So far on this team, and with the players we have on this team, we all want the best for this team. I know as time goes on, we're going to perform to the best of our abilities."

On how he thinks the "book" ends:

"You have to just stick with us and wait until the end."

On what has helped him adjust most this season:

"I would say, anytime I step on the court, the seniors try to tell me what I need to do, and try to guide me in the right direction. I'd say that's been the biggest help for me, which most people would not see from the outside."

-SDSU-