



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State-Air Force Postgame Quotes January 30, 2019

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"I told the team before the game that this is an opportunity for us to build a little momentum, to have back-to-back home games. Obviously, we struggled on the road, so it's a win a loss a win a loss a win a loss. So now, we had two back-to-back home games, we won them both and now we feel like we have some positive momentum, not just by winning but by the way we're playing. This is the second game in a row that I think we did a really good job rebounding the basketball, which has been something that's hurt us all year; it hurt us at Air Force, and so the rebounding was critical. We finally had some assists. At Air Force in the first half there, we had one assist and then for the game we had seven. I think we had 15 or 16 assists tonight, which is the way I like to play and the way the team likes to play, so we're playing better. On a negative note, 16 turnovers is way too many. Too many unforced errors, but with that being said, we still had a comfortable lead for most of the game and we played 40 minutes of zone, which we hadn't done all year. We played some zone at Air Force and it was actually effective, but we weren't rebounding out of it, so we got behind and had to go to man to try and change the rhythm of the game. Because we got the lead, we felt so comfortable in the zone; we stayed in the two-three zone the entire game and obviously when you have a lead, it's hard to score quickly against the zone. For them to make a comeback, they would almost have to play perfect at that point because it takes so long to get a shot against the zone, so I thought the zone defense was really important for us today."

On how playing Air Force recently helped their success tonight:

"We've been working on our zone and just some subtle things to make sure we're good to throw our hands up when we come up top and just to discourage some passes. We've worked hard on it, but we've also worked hard on man. We spent half our practice prepared to man them. They took 47 threes in their last game against San Jose. So, you sit there in your end zone and they make three or four threes in a row and then you sit there on the bench and you start squirming a little bit, but they never had consecutive threes and, if they did, there weren't that many to get us out of the zone. Sometimes you give up the three and say we can't give up threes in the zone, we got to go man. We were prepared to man, but zone was effective, so we just stayed in it the entire game."

On Aguek Arop's progress:

"AG would practice really well and then he would get in the game and he'd be a step slow, he'd be a step hesitant, like should I go here and is this what I should be doing, and that moment of hesitation and then you're late to the play. Now, he's just moving out there. He's free-flowing. He had a backdoor cut for a dunk. He's pursuing the ball quick on the glass. I think it's just him getting more comfortable on the floor. We've seen that in practice, but he hasn't translated it to the games. I think you're finally seeing him play at the speed of the game. As he does that, he'll continue and we'll continue to get better."

On if Jordan Schakel being out affects Arop's playing time:

"He would get those minutes anyway, whether it was for Matt (Mitchell) or for Jordan. I don't mind playing those guys. Maybe it would be a minute or two less, but he would still be getting minutes and as he plays better, those minutes will continue to go up."

On what's changed since last playing Air Force:

"Eighteen days ago: first game at altitude, Jeremy (Hemsley) coming off being sick — these are all excuses — no Nolan (Narain), no Joel (Mensah), [Nathan Mensah] got in foul trouble. So, every game is different if you're healthy or not healthy. I didn't have Jordan Schakel today and Devin (Watson) didn't practice for two and a half days. He was actually a game-time decision. He warmed up and made sure he could go with a thigh contusion. Nolan Narain was in a walking boot until tip; he warmed up and went, but couldn't go in the second half. So, sometimes games are changed just based on who you have available. Joel got some minutes today because Nolan couldn't play the second half and he did a good job in the middle of the zone. Sometimes the best ability is availability. So, if you're available, then you're going to play. I played everybody that was available today."

On what the Aztecs did well:

"I'm just happy that the zone worked so well. We were having our success with it and we didn't have to change out of it. It's always easier as a coach when you build a lead. Devin's three-point play at the end of the first half was huge to extend the lead to 16 at half time, instead of 13. That was a big play. That was a big lead. You're talking Fresno two days ago where they made a play and all of a sudden we're up 12 instead of 18. So, Devin's play at the end of the half was kind of a momentum play and it helped us lead in the second half. I like the fact that we shared the ball. We weren't great against their zone, they zoned us the back half of the game, but we're playing with a lead, and again we're being more cautious. We're wanting to run 20 seconds instead of quick-shooting and let them come down and get a fast break. The last two games where we've looked out of rhythm at the end of the game offensively, a lot of that's on me just slowing my team down and saying we're playing with a lead, we're going to shorten the game and make them have to play a perfect game to catch us. Some of that offensive rhythm was on me again, instead of the team."

On the success of zone play:

"I think they would have rather seen us in man, but they've seen a lot of zone and they're getting better against it. We played a pretty good zone today. We didn't just play a zone, we played a good zone."

On keeping the defensive intensity going into games where they didn't just lose to the opponent by a large margin:

"Our defense is better, even though we lost at Fresno, it was a four-point game and our defense was pretty solid. The rebounding cost us that game, so we've cleaned up rebounding since then and have gotten better rebounding and continue to sell the fact that you win with defensive rebounding. I told them, 'As long as our defense and rebounding are good, we're going to be in every game, and eventually, we'll find something that works offensively. We'll call a play or two and find something that gives us some rhythm, and we'll run with that. As long as we defend, we can find those one or two plays that will work in that game and let us get in a rhythm. But, all the sudden if you're down 16, 18 points because you're not defending, then you try to rush your game and you can't find a rhythm. The better we play defensively, the better offensive rhythm we seem to be getting in.'"

On if he feels like the team has turned a corner after these last two home games:

"We have to find a way to win our first conference road game. We have to go in there—this is a tough stretch. We've got two days and then we're at San Jose, and then we have two more days and we're in New Mexico. It is quick preps, so we'll come back from San Jose Sunday, practice Sunday, leave Monday and play in Albuquerque Tuesday. This is tough. It's always easier at home, but the travel, the altitude and all those things are factors, so we have to find a way to be tough enough to play through all that. Confidence is a big part of it. I told that to Air Force the day before the game that their team is playing with swagger and confidence and if you have that, you can beat anybody. We have to start getting some of that. The more you win, the more you get that, the more you start believing. We have to continue to believe we're getting better and that we're doing it with our defense and our rebounding."

San Diego State Forward Matt Mitchell

On how they felt getting "revenge" against Air Force:

"We got it. Jeremy (Hemsley) pretty much said it perfectly, but we've got to go into every game like that. Got to go into every game thinking that we're going to cut their head off and do what we've got to do."

On what they feel like they did better in this game:

"Rebounding. We rebounded well, I think they only had four offensive rebounds for the game. That just shows that we can do it and we can be a good rebounding team. All we've got to do is put our mind to it and say, 'We've got to go rebound,' and we're going to beat people up on the boards. That's what we did."

On where the confidence of the team is at right now:

"Any of my teammates shoot a three and I think it's going in. We all believe in each other and we all know we can do well. We're all about the team and we're not about individual play. I think that speaks for itself when we can show celebrations for each other and can be happy for one another. I feel like we're in a good place. [The confidence]—It's high going into San Jose. We need to get on that three-game winning streak and get it going. Once we get that going, I feel like we can roll pretty well."

On how they did defensively tonight and holding Air Force to 19 points in the first half:

"We're a defensive team—defensive and offensive team, well-rounded. I feel like them having 19 points at halftime wasn't so much of a surprise for us; it's what we're supposed to do. We're supposed to lock teams up. We're supposed to hold them to minimal points."

On why the zone defense was more effective tonight versus last time they played Air Force:

"We competed. Simple as that. We wanted it, we wanted to compete and we wanted to play hard, wanted to play harder than them. We knew that we owed Air Force something, and coming into that, since that last loss that we had, we just didn't want that feeling in the room again and I don't think that feeling [was there]."

San Diego State Guard Jeremy Hemsley

On how they felt getting "revenge" against Air Force:

"I feel like every game is a revenge game. That's just my [take]. I've been here for the good and I've been here for the bad. A lot of the games last year were kind of up and down, it was bad so I came into this whole year with a mindset of revenge. Every game is a revenge game. I think we were on the same page now. We wanted to win. We wanted to play better because when we went up there, we didn't play as good, we didn't play like ourselves. I think everybody just came out tonight wanting to prove something."

On what they think they could improve upon:

"I think we've just got to play through it when we are tired. That's something we haven't done a good job of. When we get fatigued, we just kind of let our minds slip and don't play as hard. I think that's something we all [need to] do—starting with myself—playing hard when we get tired."

On Jalen McDaniels' six straight double-doubles:

"It seems effortless, to be honest. Like I said last time I was up here, he just has a nose for the ball. He always seems to know where the ball is going to go when the shot goes up. He plays with a lot of energy, and if you do that, anybody will notice it. If you're good, they'll find you, and Jalen has been consistent when it comes to that—rebounding the ball and scoring points. He does whatever the coaches ask of him, and I think he does a good job of just doing his role for the team."

On how they did defensively tonight and holding Air Force to 19 points in the first half vs. 32 in the second half:

"That second half, there was a stretch where we didn't have any stops. I think they scored like four or five times in a row. You can't beat the elite teams if you're giving up stretches like that, so that's something we've got to work on, for sure. Overall, like Matt (Mitchell) said, we're a defensive team and I think the focus is always to get stops in. We look to use our defense as a push for offense."

On why the zone defense was more effective tonight versus last time they played Air Force:

"On film, too, that's always in the back of my mind, I know if I look bad or if I'm not going as hard in the zone, once we watch film in the locker room, I'm going to be the guy that's getting pointed out or the coaches are going to recognize it and point me out. I think the coaches did a good job of showing us our mistakes up there in Colorado. We just played hard, we competed and when you compete, you can play through the mistakes."

Air Force Head Coach Dave Pilipovich

On having a difficult time finding momentum on offense:

"You're exactly right, and they got some momentum early. They made some threes. They made some shots early. They forced us out, and we didn't attack the middle. Anytime we got the ball to the middle or baseline, we scored verse their zone, but we settled for threes and late shot clock threes. That's not good for us. We tried to make some adjustments. We did it the second half and went 32-30, but by then it was too late. We never really got Ryan Swan involved. He only got three offensive attempts, so that wasn't a good combination for us."

On there being more pressure on defense when the offense isn't there:

"It does. At times we weren't bad defensively and created some steals, but we didn't get points off our steals. We only got four points of their turnovers. We only turned it over 11 times – one of them was a shot clock violation. Again, if we open up and we attack and are more aggressive early in the first half, I think it's a different game."

On their offense:

"We struggled – Ameka (Ayaya) – we lost him. He hurt his knee a little bit, so we went with Lavelle (Scottie), Ryan (Swan) and Keaton (Van Soelen) a little bit in there, and then we got some open perimeter shots, and we didn't make those in the first half. In the second half, Chris [Christopher Joyce] made a couple threes and some perimeter shots, but again once we attacked the middle, I think Lavelle did pretty good in the middle. Then we got some baseline dump offs from him and Ryan, and we finished, but unfortunately when we didn't capitalize, they got some three-point plays on the other end."

On if he's concerned about trailing by double digits at the half:

"Yeah, and it's been versus a zone play. We talked about that briefly in there. We've got to make a little bit of an adjustment in our zone offense because now I think teams would zone us because of our lack of production. We've got to tweak some things right there. We have to grow on the road. This was a great test for us tonight. We settled a little bit backwards in our play a little bit, but we'll bounce back."

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