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San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes

Tuesday, Nov. 19, 2019

Fowler Athletics Center

Head Coach Rocky Long

Opening statement:

"It's nice to be in the position we're in that we're playing for a possibility of getting in a conference championship game. It's nice to be 8-2, bowl eligible, all those kind of things. So I anticipate a really close game this week. Hawai'i is the best passing team in our league. Schematically, they (have) four and five wide receivers every single snap. If you take enough guys out of the box to cover them correctly, then they run it really really well. They have two talented quarterbacks (Cole McDonald, Chevan Cordeiro) and some really good receivers. So we're going to have to play really really well to have a chance to win."

On whom he compares Hawai'i quarterback Cole McDonald to:

"Jordan Love (Utah State). I hope I got the right one because there are two Loves. Both of them are pretty good. Both of those quarterbacks named Love are pretty good in our league. He's very accurate with the football. He winds up a little bit to throw it if you're looking for characteristics, but he can throw all the all the routes. He's got a strong arm. So if they beat you deep, he can throw it deep, all those things."

On if Hawai'i wide receivers are dangerous yards-after-catch players:

No, they dump it off and let those guys make you miss. The system is such that every tackle is made in the open field, every single tackle is made in the open field. And even if you're playing zone coverage, a lot of those tackles are one-on-one tackles in the open field. It's the way the game is going now. You see it more and more all the time."

On how much Hawai'i compares to San José State and other teams with similar styles:

"How much are they? The only resemblance between them and anybody else in our league is when the other teams go four and five wide receivers. The San Joses of the world, and all those people that throw the ball a lot, have that in their package, but they also have tight ends in their package. They also have fullbacks in their package, they also have double tight end formations in their package. These guys don't. These guys have at least four wide receivers in the game all the time. And then every once in a while, they'll take the running back out of there and throw five wide receivers in there. Formation-wise, it's very simple. Scheme-wise, it's as difficult as defending the triple option. And I still think the triple option is the best offense ever designed. This is very similar on the opposite end of the scale. It's very difficult to get ready to play these guys."

On Hawai'i head coach Nick Rolovich:

"He's a really good guy that really knows what he's doing. I understand that his players like him and are playing hard for him and obviously their talent level is improving, so he's an awfully good recruiter, too. Since he played there, he probably

understands how things work in the culture there and all that and that probably helped him, too. But he's an excellent coach that seems to be in the right place."

On how difficult it is to incorporate so many transfers into one system like Hawai'i:

"It's all determined on what kind of kids they're letting transfer in there. In this day and age, there's a lot of people out there transferring that don't think they're playing enough or for other reasons. I'm sure that he's done this, if you're very very careful about recruiting a transfer, you have to check their personalities and how they view the game. If all you do is recruit and allow transfers that are team guys, there's no problems whatsoever, there's no issues whatsoever. If they're not team guys, they can cause you a problem. No matter how skilled they are or how good they are, they can cause you a problem if they're not team guys. If they are team guys, there's no issues whatsoever. I mean, they come there with some experience, they know how to play football, they also know a college playbook and all that stuff. It's actually really really easy if the kids got the right personality."

On if there are any extra challenges to playing a road game at Hawai'i:

"Well, I think it's like playing in New York, too. I mean, it's jet lag. The longer you stay on that plane, the less you are yourself. I don't think there's a fatigue factor whatsoever, but there is a little bit of a hangover from being in an airplane that long. The real problem is not that game, it's the game after it because you basically lose a whole day in an airplane. You lose a day of preparation, you lose a day of rest, all those kind of things for your next game."

On whether he's confident in the defense or if he feels they need to step up even more:

"If they do what they're doing, we're okay. But they're faced with a much bigger challenge, a huge challenge, but the challenge is completely different than anything we've seen all year long because of the scheme that Hawaii runs and they're really good at it. So if you haven't seen it before, it's just — and I keep saying this — it's like playing the triple option. If you haven't seen the triple option all year, check who's leading the nation in rushing and other top 10 teams in the nation in rushing. They're all triple option teams. All the (service) academies are. Well, there's a few guys like Hawaii, but we haven't played anybody like Hawai'i all year long. So getting ready for that kind of scheme in a week is very very difficult."

On Hawai'i head coach Nick Rolovich:

"I think they play better at home. I think they're more comfortable there. And I think that their team is really good this year and it's been a while since they were playing for a chance to win a championship. And my impression, and I recruited Hawai'i when I was at Oregon State, my impression of Hawai'i is that they really like football (there). So I assume it's going to be a pretty good crowd and there's going to be a lot of energy in the state."

On where the onus lies for the defense to contain Hawai'i this week:

"If you don't get a pass rush, the secondary has to be outstanding. If you get a pass rush, the secondary doesn't have to be as good. And I think every game is determined up front first. It's not determined by the guys up front, but if you win the battle up front, you're most likely going to win the game. If the battle up front is equal, now it's the skill guys that decide who wins the game."

On Hawai'i defeating Arizona and Oregon State earlier this year:

"I picked them. If anybody remembers, when everybody asked me who I thought was going to be the better teams in the league. I told them Hawai'i because they had a lot of their players coming back and the quarterbacks were coming back. So it's not surprising to me at all. Besides that, it's not surprising to me at all that anybody in our league can beat any of those guys."

On the challenges facing the offense this week:

"Well, to have the best chance to win the game, we have to be able to run the ball and keep them off the field. And so that's the biggest challenge we have. I mean, they're big strong young men up front for Hawaii, and we've not shown a tendency to be

consistent at running the football. So we got to be able to run the ball, keep the ball away from them, eat up some clock and score some points."

On the similarities between Hawai'i and Brigham Young, the Aztecs' next two opponents:

Well, I haven't watched BYU on film, but I'm not sure they're similar. I mean, anybody that throws the ball you're going to think is similar, but they're not. I mean, our last game they (Fresno State) throw the ball quite a bit, too, but they use a lot of different formations and a lot of different personnel. And these guys are very very simple on who they have on the field. They're pretty simple on what they do. They just do it all day long and very very well. They spread you from sideline to sideline and there's a whole bunch of one-on-one open field tackles, if you're close enough to cover them in the first place. So if you get the right players and practice the same thing over and over and over and over again, you get pretty darn good at it."

On how satisfying it is to be 8-2 despite some nagging injuries:

"We're happy where we are. The number one goal in the program is to win the conference championship and we're 10 games in and we still have a possibility of getting in that championship game. So winning eight games, if you look at the history of San Diego State in the last 30 years or so and you take you take the last 10 years out of it, there's very few eight-win seasons in there, very few. A lot of people around here forget that."

On if Hawai'i is a different team at home:

"I think they played better at home. I think they're more comfortable there and I think that their team is really good this year. It's been a while since they were playing for a chance to win a championship. I recruited Hawaii when I was at Oregon State and my impression of Hawaii is that they really like football there. So I assume it's going to be a pretty good crowd and there's going to be a lot of energy in the stadium."

Senior quarterback Ryan Agnew

On having a chance to beat Hawai'i and make the conference championship game:

"Exactly. All of our goals are in place. The best part is we control our own destiny and we're excited for it."

On if it's been strange being so streaky on offense:

"It's been strange. You want to be consistent all the times, you want to be successful at all times, but we don't live in a perfect world. (We) can't run a perfect offense at all times. You've just got to do whatever it takes when things don't go your way. Just bounce back as quick as possible."

On the health of his calf:

"(The calf) is doing great, definitely improving day-to-day. It's not going to inhibit me at all. I'm going to be a 100 percent going into Hawai'i. I'm excited for it. The adrenaline is going to be pumping, so I'm really excited for it."

On when he hurt the calf muscle:

"I did it early in the game last week. It didn't hit me. I think, like I said, the adrenaline gets pumping. You don't really feel anything. You're kind of just worried about the game. It didn't really affect me too much."

On if he remembers last year's overtime loss with Hawai'i:

"I remember last year, especially being the last home game of the regular season on Senior Night. We definitely remember that loss and you don't want to weigh on it too much, but you watch the film from last year. You try not to make the same mistakes this year. But last year was last year and this year is this year. You learn from it, but don't let it affect you at this point in time."

On if he was in the zone on Friday night by throwing for over 300 yards for the first time:

"I think it came from great receiver play and great blocking. You saw Jesse Matthews make catches that were unbelievable. They're winning their one-on-one matchups. You saw Elijah (Kothe) make that play at the end. So I think a lot of it goes to the receivers, just winning one-on-one matchups. I trust them. I knew if I put in the area, they said they're going to go get the football. If they're going to give those matchups (and) they're going to play like that, you can throw for a lot of yardage. It's really awesome to see a bunch of guys get catches, a bunch of guys get yards."

On if he has seen his offense getting better:

"Every game is different. You go into each game, you don't say, 'hey, we want to throw for this many yards run for this many yards.' You say we're going to do whatever it takes to win. We're going to do whatever it takes to score one more point. The game on Friday night against Fresno it took over 300 yards passing and we needed every single yard because Fresno State was a great team in a rivalry game, and we've got to do whatever it takes."

On SDSU being 8-2 despite all of the injuries to the team:

"I think if you look at most teams in the country, no team is going to say they're healthy. Everybody's hurt at this point. That just goes what we were doing in the offseason with (strength & conditioning) coach Hall. It's next man up just because you're in there and you weren't the starter at the beginning of the season doesn't mean we're not expecting production from you. It doesn't mean we're not going to expect to win. I don't know what Tariq (Thompson) has to say, but whoever's in there we have to trust them and we've built that trust starting in January."

On the expectations of this program and whether you like the pressure of fans wanting you to be better:

"We love that pressure. People wouldn't put those expectations on you if they didn't believe you could achieve it. It would be one thing if people were like, 'Oh, I can't believe these guys are 8-2.' I'm kind of glad people are not as happy as they want to be at 8-2 because it means they expect a lot out of us. And we expect a lot of out of ourselves. And yeah, we're 8-2 and we're happy, but we feel like we could easily have won another game or two, but that just goes to show we have a lot of confidence ourselves. We have a lot of people who have confidence in us and as long as we go out there and do everything we can. We're going to put our best foot forward when you try to win as many football games as we can and we try to do it every single time we step on the field."

Junior Warrior Tariq Thompson

On not getting much rest trying to stop Hawai'i's potent offense:

"They're definitely a threat. You can't relax. There's certain plays where they run four receivers deep and then the next play they do the same thing. There's certain plays where they set quick screen or they just keep you guessing. There a fantastic offense. So it's going to be a challenge this year again."

On if their receivers are running to open spaces or creating mismatches:

"They throw the ball everywhere. The quarterback Cole McDonald is great. The receivers like Cedric Byrd and Jojo Ward, they get open spots and they're great after the catch. Our goal is to limit that because they're killing teams by catching the ball, breaking a couple tackles and then taking it the distance. That's definitely one of our priorities this week."

On if there is any team that reminds him of Hawai'i:

"I don't really know if we play anybody like that this year, but if I compare it to any offense, it's like a West Coast offense. They're taking a lot of crossing routes, a lot of shallows, a lot of breaking routes. They're just breaking tackles and making plays."

On SDSU being 8-2 despite all of the injuries to the team:

"Our mentality is next man up. We can be short-handed, but I feel like I trust the next guy to make a play. Our d-line has been fantastic. Like you said, we have seniors in there but they play like their upperclassmen now. They just have a chip on their shoulder to prove everyone wrong and they're doing a great job."

On if it is critical to tackle the receivers well on Saturday:

"(There is) enormous pressure on (the defensive backs). We can win the game if we can limit their catches to no yards after the catch. That would be huge for us as a defense because they're breaking so many tackles. They're very elusive receivers and running backs that can make you miss. Our goal is to stop the yards after catch because it could kill us."

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