



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

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### San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes

Tuesday, Nov. 26, 2019

Fowler Athletics Center

#### Head Coach Rocky Long

##### **Opening statement:**

"Happy Thanksgiving to everyone, and you know, I'm thankful for a lot of things. I'm a pretty lucky guy and I imagine most of you in this room are, too, so it's a good time to be thankful for a lot of things. We've got a really good football team coming in here. BYU's an exceptional football team. They had a period when they were struggling when the starting quarterback was out with a hand injury . . . They've been playing at a (high) level since he got back. Since he's been the starting quarterback and he got back, it's the best football team we'll play against all year to this point."

##### **On quarterback Ryan Agnew's availability and who might play in his place:**

"We're going to keep him off his feet today and tomorrow and see how he feels on Thursday . . . Carson Baker and then Jordan (Brookshire) would play after that. Mark Salazar is hurt, Joe Green our freshman quarterback is hurt. We have five quarterbacks (but) only two of them are healthy."

##### **On if there's a reassessment of goals now that a conference championship is out of reach:**

"That's our number one goal, but guess what, we've done a lot of really good things this year, really good. Statistically, (we're) one of the best defenses in the country. I think I've been told this, we're the only college football team and pro football team in the state of California that has qualified for postseason play the last 10 years. That's pretty darn good stuff. Now, I'm telling you that's pretty good stuff. We have eight wins already, so we'll have a winning record no matter what happens the next two games. We're going to get to play in a bowl game. No matter what happens, we're going to get to play in a bowl game . . . Our primary goal is to win the conference championship and you can say it's a terrible season because we didn't hit our number one goal. Anybody in this room that hits their number one goal all the time, you shouldn't be sitting in this room because you're a multi-billionaire and you should be having a good time. So if you don't hit your number one goal but you hit about 50 other ones, it's a pretty darn good year no matter what happens in the next two games. We've had a great year. We have great kids in our program. We're losing a bunch of really good seniors and the naysayers out there can say whatever they want. We've had a great season."

##### **On the Aztecs' senior class:**

"I'm really proud of the senior class because I think they took a leadership role. I think toward the end of last season, we did not play the same way we normally play. We didn't play as hard. We didn't play with the want-to we should have. In the offseason, we re-established what this program is all about, and it doesn't happen unless your leadership buys in. And this senior class bought in. They've made a huge difference. Good, bad or in between, they've always had the right attitude about it and it's been team-first, so this this senior class has done a great job. I don't know how many of them are NFL guys. Most of them are not, so the next two games (are) the last two games they'll ever get to play. I can still remember the last game I ever played,

so I know what they are feeling, especially the ones that know they're not NFL guys. I know exactly how they feel, and so it'll be strange and sad all at the same time, but I think our senior class has done a great job."

**On competing as an independent football team versus playing with a conference affiliation:**

"I'd much prefer everybody being in a league. That's my personal feeling, but I'm sure every school that is independent is independent for a reason. Some of them, they can't afford the scheduling because the league they would be in they'd have to travel great distances, so they can't afford that kind of thing. Some of them think they can make more money by themselves than within a league. So I'm sure if a university can make more revenue being an independent, that's probably a smart thing to do. I mean, there's a lot of reasons for doing it. I wish everybody was in a league because I think eventually there's going to be a national tournament. And I think unless your Notre Dame, all the independents are going to be left out except Notre Dame."

**On whether the list of independent football teams will shrink or grow:**

"Well, I think that if you look at all divisions in football—and I don't know the exact facts, so don't take it for gospel—the number of football teams if you count all divisions of college football are increasing. At the Division III level, they're adding college football teams in order to get more males on their campuses. So there might be some Division I teams that will drop down to Division II or Division II teams that drop down Division III because of financing. But the likelihood of them dropping football is getting less and less all the time for reasons I don't understand. But it has to do with federal funding. So I'm talking about something I don't understand, but I know that the Division III level has increased the number of football teams they have."

**On whether if he would coach an independent football team knowing there's nothing to play for:**

"Well, I think they are playing for something. I mean, BYU's already got a bowl game lined up ... So there are there are some advantages. You can set your own schedule. For teams like BYU and Notre Dame, that's not hard. For a team like New Mexico State, they have a hard, hard time developing a schedule. I think they play one team twice home and home [Liberty]. So when you're an independent at their level, it's very, very difficult. If you're an independent at BYU and Notre Dame's level, it's not, and you can set your schedule so that you have a really good chance to win and you can set your schedule that you are a prime candidate to be in the playoff system once the playoff system is expanded. You're not counting on being the league champion or being a divisional champion and playing a league championship game. You don't have to win all those games. All you got to do is go undefeated so you can set your schedule so that you go undefeated. Guess what, if you're Notre Dame, you're in the national championship game or the tournament, you're in the national tournament."

**On the impact of BYU ever deciding to rejoin the Mountain West:**

"I think that if BYU came back to our conference it would be a positive. Because they have a national audience and they have history that proves that they're a good football program, I think it'd be a positive they were if they were back in our league."

**On whether or not it's worse to lose a championship by a wide margin:**

"Yeah, I think so. I mean, I'd feel a lot worse if we got beat by 45 and I think our team would feel a lot worse. To have a chance right to the very end to keep the game going and still have a chance to win, I think all championship games ought to be like that. I think any time you play for any kind of championship you hope that both teams are equal and it's a highly competitive game and it comes down to the end. I think all championship games you would like to be like that."

**On whether his current players are aware of the history of the BYU-SDSU rivalry:**

"No way, no how. So if we want to build up this big rivalry with BYU, the only ones that know are me and maybe (assistant coach Jeff) Horton. You know anybody that's over 60, we understand, but anybody under 30 has no idea how he heated those rivalries were because BYU was one of the top teams in the country for years and years and years. So people shot to try and knock them off. Our boys have no idea about any of that. I had to tell him the other day that some of their players are 25 to 27 years old and they looked at me like my head was cut off. See, they don't they don't even know that part of it. They watch them on film, so they know they're darn good football team, but they don't know all that other stuff. I told them they're the most mature

football team were going to play. They have no idea what that means. But from the age of 18 playing against 24- and 25-year-olds, you in this room, how much different were you at 25 as compared to 18? There was a huge difference. There's a thing called man-strength that you get about 25 or 26 years old. You don't have it at 18. No matter how much they think they are a grown man, they are not."

**On what would make BYU come back to the Mountain West:**

"I already just mentioned that I think that BYU would be a very strong addition to our league and would help our league entirely and I think they'll come back if people don't schedule. If we will not schedule them so they have an unbelievable hard time of developing a schedule, that might make them come back into the league. I don't have anything against BYU. In fact, my mother and father are alumni of BYU, they both graduated. They met there, they got married there, I was born there. I mean, I have nothing against BYU and I think they'd be a strong addition to our league. And the way to get them back is to not schedule them. Make them hunt and peck and try to find the schedule. I mean, half their schedule or three-fourths of their schedule are Mountain West Conference teams already."

**On whether next year's defense can build on this year's outstanding performance:**

"First of all, those statistics don't mean a darn thing to me until after the season's over and we do our evaluation of the program and evaluation of everything. I think there's a chance for a very strong defense next year because most of them are coming back. I mean, we lose a couple of really good players, but we have a whole bunch of guys with a lot of experience that are coming back. So the chances of being really good on defense next year are in a very positive light."

**On whether it's been hard with the Jekyll-and-Hyde nature of the offense from week to week:**

"No, I think that's just sports. Every team has an identity, and some have a different identity from year to year depending on who their players are. And it's good for people to know that even at the NFL level where they draft and pay and one of the best teams in the league has the best defense and the worst offense, the New England Patriots. I saw that on TV and it make me feel good. I mean, Tom Brady is considered the best quarterback in the league and they've got a terrible offense and they keep winning. So it can be done. It can be done a whole bunch of different ways. Some people believe you outscore everybody and everybody's happy, and some people play good defense and control the football and you have a chance to win no matter how you do it."

**On comparing this BYU team to others in the past:**

"Well, they look like the old BYU team to me the last three weeks. Which means they're pretty good on defense and really, really, really good on offense. Now, I told you already they had a three- or four-game span there that they didn't play very good and their starting quarterback was hurt. Well, he's back 100 percent and they look like the BYU team of old to me. They can run it, they can throw it. No one ever stops them. They score a whole bunch of points and their defense is good enough to keep the other team off the board."

**On BYU quarterback Zach Wilson:**

"Yeah, he's like all of the good ones now. He's very accurate with the football. He can throw the deep ball and then if there's no throws there, he can hurt you with his legs."

**On what Jordon Brookshire and Carson Baker bring in case Ryan Agnew can't play Saturday:**

"I don't know. It's a bad answer, right, but I don't know. I haven't seen them in live action since spring practice and that's an unfair evaluation because you're playing ones against ones, twos against twos, threes against threes, so I've never seen either one of those quarterbacks with our number one offense. So I have no idea and I've never seen them against the other teams' number one defense, so I have no idea what we're going to get."

## **Senior tight end Parker Houston**

### **On thoughts of playing his final home game Saturday night:**

"It's pretty emotional. I just remember last year, sitting in the back watching all the seniors run out (of the tunnel). It was emotional and it's emotional after the game. It's our last home game, but it's not my last game. We've got to keep our heads on straight. We'll still have one more bowl game left."

### **On the first senior to shed tears after the game:**

"Not to dock (Kyahva Tezino), but he just plays with so much emotion and he's invested so much into this program. He's our guy. He's the one who's getting us pumped up before the game. He's the one who breaks the (huddle). He's always energized on the sidelines. You bottle it up right and at some point it's got to come out. Kyahva is one of those guys that's just so bought in. I think it's tough for all of us this to leave the program, but it can be real tough for a few of us."

### **On how he would describe the senior class:**

"I'm going to go with (being) bought in. A lot of us have been here for four or five years and it's just a senior group that from being on the inside of it, you get to see some of the actions that the seniors have taken to help the younger guys help the program be successful. They're bought in 100 percent. Their head is on straight, always focused, and like (Brandon) Hecklen said, when it's time to lighten up, they do it in the right way."

### **On his favorite memory of being an Aztec:**

"Winning the "Old Oil Can" back is pretty tough to beat but I think when (David) Wells stretched over the goal line to beat Stanford at home. That's probably one of my favorite. When we beat Cal in 2016, it was cool. It was awesome. But we didn't play in the game and we didn't have an effect. It kind of just passes by you. But that Stanford one, that will resonate with me forever. Just seeing everybody storm the field and taking pictures with fans. It was a lot of fun."

### **On if he knows the hatred of some of the San Diego State fans of BYU:**

"I definitely think (it plays out) through social media. Seeing the pictures of Kawhi (Leonard) clapping in (Jimmer Fredette's) face and, from all the guys we follow on Twitter and from other guys who follow us, they've made it known but you know to us it is just a football team. It's just another team in our way. We've got to treat them the same as we treat everybody else. They're very good football team and very mature in the way they play. We've just got to play our best game against them."

"I mean mature in the sense of the way they play, not their age. They're very disciplined on defense. From what we've seen not a lot of missed assignments or missed gaps or things like that. Not a lot of penalties. They just play mature. It has nothing to do with their age or anything like that."

### **On the importance of having a good punter like Brandon Hecklen:**

"He's not so much a weapon, he's more of a surgeon. Just the way that he does his job and the way he carries himself out of practice and out of games. When you hear the word specialist, you don't expect a pretty high-end guy, right? You expect someone more like (long snapper) Turner Bernard with the mullet and the sweet flow, but he is a great guy. They do a lot during practice, just not a lot with the team. So it gives them a lot of opportunities to really perfect their craft and how Hecklen gets the ball to spin. He gets it to hit the 2 ½ yard line and it bounces back. It's just things like that that are amazing. He's fun to watch and being his metal shield guy, it's just fun to be on the field with him because you know when he hits a good ball, he's like a little kid in a candy shop, man. He's running down the field, and can't wait to congratulate the guys down the field."

## **Senior defensive end Myles Cheatum**

### **On thoughts of playing his final home game Saturday night:**

"I don't know yet, I've never done it before. I don't think it'll hit me until after the game. The emotions and energy from playing in the actual game and getting the opportunity to go play against BYU, such a great team. I think that's what will be at the front of my mind. I don't think until afterwards when I look around (the locker room) and see it start to empty out for the last time will it make sense. I'll probably walk the tunnel one more time after the game. That's when it will really hit me."

### **On being the only senior on the defensive line and being a leader:**

"(It's been an) honor. Truly an honor watching all those guys come together from before the season. Everyone didn't really know what we were capable of doing, a lot of question marks. I think the time and effort that we put in day in and day out every single week. It's truly just been an honor to watch that happen (and) to be a part of that."

### **On the first senior to shed tears after the game:**

"Kyhva (Tezino)."

### **On how he would describe the senior class:**

"Tight knit. I think everybody has everybody's best interest and also the best interest of putting the team first. Understanding truly what it takes to be a senior. Obviously coming from the bottom to the top you put the work in, and you didn't really understand why at first. It starts to make sense as you get a little bit older. It all makes sense and I think everyone kind of embodies that true Aztec warrior spirit. What it truly takes to go top to bottom to this program and leave it all on the field."

### **On his favorite memory of being an Aztec:**

"(The) Stanford game, definitely. When the lights went out, that was crazy. Everyone had their phones out (and) lit up there. It was like we were at a concert. I actually have a picture. Someone was standing behind me and took pictures of my back with the whole stadium lit up behind. It was really cool to see. Then afterwards, actually that semester I had been taking a sign language class, and someone ran on the field and they were not speaking and they signed to me. They wanted to take a picture with me and it was the weirdest thing to see something translate from the classroom to the field that you would never expect to happen. So I signed back to him that I was studying at SDSU and he got really excited. And so him and a couple of his friends took pictures me after the game and that's probably one of the one things I really truly cherish from that game."

### **On if he knows the hatred of some of the San Diego State fans of BYU:**

"Honestly, I don't really get on Twitter very much to look at the stuff from the game, especially the week leading up to the game. You can unlock after the game, like on Sundays. I know what I know about BYU because of the product that they put on the field as opposed to what the fans have to say."

### **On being aware of the rivalry between the two schools:**

"I just think it's going to be a really good game. I think they're a really good team and we're really good team, and when two good teams are on field usually it's a great game. I know we're going to play hard and I would expect them to play hard. We'll definitely just see what happens."

### **On the importance of having a good punter like Brandon Heicklen:**

"It's definitely warming. I thought of knowing that the person that's about to let the other team's offense on the field is about to put them as far back as he possibly can. I think that's just a testament to the way Brandon works. He comes to practice every day ready to work, ready to get better. He pushes other guys in his group to get better every single day. And I think that's really seen off the field. Not a lot of people know Brandon as well as I know Brandon off the field, but he has the same approach to

everything that he does to try to be the absolute best. I think the defense, we really appreciate it, and we know that we're going to get a favorable opportunity against the opposing team's offense."

### **Senior punter Brandon Heicklen**

#### **On how it felt to be named the Mountain West Special Teams Player of the Week:**

"It felt fantastic. It's something that you work for every single time that you get out on the field. I feel like I'm getting a lot of credit for something that the special teams did together. (Long snapper) Turner (Bernard) did a great job snapping, the guys did a great job blocking, Chase (Jasmin) was unbelievable stopping the ball at the 2 and Nolen (Harris) stopping the ball at the 3. So I feel like this is an award for everybody."

#### **On if he feels like this is the cherry on top to finish his senior year:**

"Yeah, it does. It does feel a little bit different being a senior. I'm really happy that this is the way that I'm going to be going out, but I want to share with everybody."

#### **On thoughts of playing his final home game Saturday night:**

"It really hasn't hit me yet. It's one of those things that once I'm out there. I'm going to feel it. But for right now, I'm just kind of rolling along one practice at a time."

#### **On how he would describe the senior class:**

"I would say this senior class is really mature. Every time that they get out on the field, we're trying to inspire the guys that are underneath us to do the best job that they can and we hold everybody accountable. We believe that everybody needs to do their best when they get on the field and be responsible. At the same time, we can go out there, have fun and play our best. That's how I would characterize this class."

#### **On his favorite memory of being an Aztec:**

"For me, it's the same (Stanford) game. When the lights went out, that was something that you're never going to forget. Then finishing it out with a win against a top 25 team at the time. It was unbelievable. That's a team that everybody respects in the nation. To go out there and play the way that we did, that's something that you're never going to forget."

**-SDSU-**