



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State-Utah State Postgame Quotes

February 9, 2019

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"A really satisfying team victory tonight. We set a game plan, switched up what we were doing two days ago and got it done on the floor. I've got a group of kids that want to get better, want to be coached, and want to play the right way. We knew Utah State was a very good defensive team and we'd have trouble scoring on our initial sets, so we spent two days working on driving, sharing and passing the ball. In those two days we got that and it's very satisfying to have that happen. Utah State is a magnificent team, so I told the kids that this is a big stepping stone for us. It'll show us what lies ahead and that we can play with the top of the league leading into March because we're not going anywhere unless we win the conference tournament. This was the first test against one of those teams that will be there at the end. We got some experience, have some lessons that still need to be learned, but it's a step in the right direction. Keys for the game were to out rebound Utah State because they've been beating their opponents by seven on the glass in the conference, and we out rebounded them. We only had nine assists in New Mexico so I said we needed 15 in this game and we got 15 assists. We had 16 turnovers at New Mexico and we finished this game with eight. So all the areas we wanted to be successful in we were. The only goal we didn't reach was that we wanted to hold them to eight or under for threes. In all their losses, against Fresno they made six threes, BYU three, Houston three or four, so the teams that have beat them have kept them from making the threes. Even though they got 10, we kept some of their shooters from getting good looks. Utah State I'm sure will be excited to see us when we come to their place."

On game plan against Sam Merrill:

"We wanted to limit Merrill as best we could. Everybody goes over a lot of that stuff on Merrill, we thought we'd choose the route to go under and make him shoot behind which he proved he could do. Toward the very end we started to go over, but he's such a good passer that if you go over a lot of that stuff he turns it in and gets everybody else involved. It seemed like he was scoring a lot but he's such a magnificent play-maker that maybe by going under and making him shoot all those, we took his playmaking ability away enough to make a difference. The other key is that everyone knows we like to double in the post, but we told them that Neemias Queta was like a point-guard in there. When he gets it in there he's such a good passer that he moves it out and they get a ton of threes off that. So we rolled the dice and we said we'll play him straight up with Nathan Mensah. We worked two days with Nathan on guarding the post by himself and then just tried to stay out more on the perimeter when it went in there. We took his ability to get the ball out and we made him score over Nathan, and he did score but Nathan did a good job limiting how many baskets he got in there."

On coming back in the first half:

"I think our defense was key. You can't go on a run unless you get stops, and with New Mexico we didn't get any stops. When you get stops you get a run and you can run your fast-breaks and free flow a little more. It's tough scoring in the half-court when the other team knows every set you're running. So I think getting stops was critical to our run."

On performance at home vs. away:

"I comment on Nathan (Mensah) at New Mexico, he tried to take a charge and slid over, and he fell down and got a block. I asked him at the end of the game on the bus, "Nathan (Mensah) why don't you try taking more charges?" he said "well because the referee told me if I don't have my feet set there I can't take them" so he has to get through just figuring out how to do it and just getting more comfortable, and he is also the guy

that asked me if we could go to the road trips two days early so he can get more comfortable, no we can't go two days early to a road trip." So, they will slowly figure it out, they are freshman. It is what you deal with as a head coach. Maybe we will trick him and tell him we are going two days early, I don't know. He was magnificent, we were a key player in the game at both ends of the floor."

On Nathan Mensah being comfortable at away games:

"The sooner the better for me. I hope it happens against Colorado State. We have to give him the ball more, the kid has to believe that when we give him the ball, good things are going to happen. I think they are starting to, we put him in there and he made a couple great moves, as they grow with their confidence in him, then he grows with his confidence, it will give us another dimension to our offense where we can throw it inside to Nathan (Mensah) instead of just Jalen (McDaniels) and Matt (Mitchell)."

On Jordan Schakel injury:

I guess what I have been led to believe, they think the ankle is stable, but they thought during the New Mexico game he aggravated or irritated the Achilles, that's what I have been told. Maybe we have to do a better job of communicating with everybody, but he was unable to play, and he is rehabbing like crazy. Maybe it's a strain or irritation, idk what it is. Sergio (Ibarra) tells me, whether he can play or not play, I would be surprised if we would have him by Tuesday, I think more realistically it will be a week from today and hopefully we will get him back, he's missed a lot of time, he's valuable, he's a starter, and we need him in the lineup so we have to get him back.

On the team's shot selection and field-goal percentage:

"I like the fact that we shot with 37% because it means we probably won with our defense. Which is kind of an Aztec trademark, you shoot 37% and win, you probably played pretty good defense, and I thought we did. We seemed in control offensively, it never felt like we were panicked or playing too fast. A couple times they zoned us in the first half and didn't get to where we wanted to go and our spots to run the plays, but I felt so good with the ball in Devin's (Watson) hand at the end of the game, creating shots for himself, or other players or drawing fouls. He played at a controlled tempo that a senior guard plays with. There was nothing rushed with what he did, he seemed like he always knew what he wanted to be on the floor with the ball and he moved it pretty freely but when he needed to take over, he got to the foul line and drew fouls like crazy down the stretch and that's what good guards do."

On offensive rebounding:

"Really good. I mean when you throw AG (Aguék Arop) in there with Nathan (Mensah) and Jalen (McDaniels), AG (Aguék Arop) is an aggressive rebounder too. So not only does he have offense, he is definitely impactful at the defensive end, but we did a good job on the glass. A lot of times on the road, if we are playing a running team, we will send three guys back on the shot where we don't want to give fast breaks up, but we didn't really make that a priority this game, we talked about sending two back and three to the glass."

On Viejas energy

"I think there is always energy in Viejas, this is a great environment and a great home crowd. There is a reason home teams win a lot of games and why we win a lot of games at home, because of this crowd, our environment is better than most and they get behind the Aztecs and they get on the other team and get on the officials if they don't like a call and it all has an effect on the game, so it is always good to be at home."

SDSU senior guard Devin Watson

On the game involving a lot of long runs:

"That's just basketball, a game of runs. Whichever team was trying to pick up the most momentum. This is a basketball game of runs, so it all came down to defense in the end."

On being able to generate fouls tonight:

"Tonight I got to the free-throw pretty well. I'm just trying to draw the fouls that we knew we could get in the paint. One play I got him off his feet."

On challenges of playing on the road:

"It's difficult. It's different. You go in there a day before and practice and shoot around the next day. Film. Three film sessions and you're sleeping in a bed that you're not accustomed to at the hotel, so it's very hard, but the quicker you figure it out, the quicker you learn and the better it's going to be. It's tough, but you'll get through it."

On atmosphere of the game:

"It's always great when the crowd is involved and it's packed like that. I was looking up at six minutes thinking 'Where everybody at,' and then I see everybody. So, it's a great atmosphere. There was a big energy today. I think it's going to be like that from here on out."

On how the team played in the second half:

"It felt amazing. Before we went out, I told the guys we've been up at the half too many times for another one to slip away, so we just got to stay focused. We have to go out here and play another 20 minutes, play a full 20 minutes, and I think we did that. It felt amazing, that was a big win."

On what was different this game than the others:

"We just focused. We played with an IQ tonight and I felt like that was the key. We played smart in the end and we also played defense. We locked up, even though Merrill was getting his buckets. I felt like we made it tough on them and then we went and gutted rebounds. Guys like A.G. (Aguak Arop) came crashing in. I just felt like we gutted out and it felt good."

On contributions in tonight's game:

"It's just the flow of the game. We felt a play that kept working and we just kept running it. Either they foul me or our guy got a shot or I got to the basket. I feel like it was just in the flow and just in the rhythm."

On awareness of 23-0 run:

"No, we were just out there playing. Nate locking up and blocking shots, finishing. You saw that left-hand jump hook then he flexed on him. We were just out there having fun."

On how this game builds confidence moving forward:

"This definitely built confidence. We wanted that win bad, especially being up three at halftime. We've been in that position too many times, so we were just telling ourselves we can't let this one go. Shout out to Jeremy (Hemsley) too, even though (Sam) Merrill was getting on him, he made it tough on him. Shout out to Jeremy (Hemsley) because he gets that defense assignment every night."

San Diego State Forward Nathan Mensah

On first career double double:

"Feels great. My teammates put me in a good spot to play. The look at me as more than a freshman and they expect big things from me."

On challenges of playing on the road as a freshman:

"It is really hard. My coaches are aware of this, and personally I am aware of this. I think most road games are really hard for me being a freshman and also being new to the travel system. You just go there and expect to play, compared to the home games where they're at home and you're not new to the environment. I would say that plays a major factor in me as a person."

On his matchup with Neemias Queta:

"Before the game, the coaches were saying, 'He's really good and he keeps on pounding and pounding,' and I felt like I had to prove to him and the coaches I am also good enough."

Utah State Head Coach Craig Smith

On tonight's performance:

"I thought they played great basketball. For us, we were just really choppy and not very consistent in any area. Tonight, certainly, we got off to a good start. Felt like we should have been up even more. They came out in a zone, and we've – quite frankly – done very well against zones. We

could have been up even more early on. We had some opportunities slip there, and then obviously they went on that big run, and we didn't have an answer on either side. We couldn't get anything to fall for us. You have to credit them. They outrebounded us. I thought they were the aggressor. It seemed like they were getting every 50/50 ball. They're a very good team at home obviously. Sam Merrill was really, really, really good tonight and not just because he had 35, but he just had that look to him and did what leaders do. When they made that run, he just went and got the ball and really got it on attack. I think we finished the half with either 7-8 or 8-9 stops. We went to out 1-2-2, kind of three-quarter court press to zone – probably should have done more of that – but that got us back in the game and got it to manageable – only down four at halftime. As bad as we were that first half, we were in striking zone. We kind of came out punching, got up a little bit, but they just made play after play after play and unfortunately, we missed some good opportunities. We had a chance . Neemias [Queta] gets fouled – goes 0-2 at the line. Next play we run and Neemias [Queta] tries to needle a backdoor pass, and we turn it over. Most nights we eliminate losing, and we didn't really eliminate losing tonight. To their credit, they got us disjointed. We have 12 assists, 12 turnovers. AT halftime, I think we have four assists and to beat a team of this quality – whether it's San Diego State or Fresno – we can't play one-on-one basketball. We have to have ball reversals, move it and we were just really sticky with it I felt like on the offensive end. We only scored 14 points in the paint, which is very unlike us in every way shape and form. It would have been a lot worse if Sam [Merrill] didn't have a heroic performance, but its been a long time since we've really depended on him – if that makes sense. They're a good team. I thought they played great. We weren't very good so to speak, and we still had an opportunity to win the game. I overheard one of their seniors as we were shaking hands and he was like one of the last ones and goes 'that's a huge win for us.' We're not into moral victories by any stretch, but it was kind of like we've done a great job up to this point of the year, putting us into this position like this, and you hear San Diego State saying what a huge win against the Aggies – that tells you what we've done up to this point. Now we have to bounce back. This game will no doubt make us better for the stretch run.

Junior guard Sam Merrill

On today's game:

"Give a lot of credit to San Diego State. They're a good team and they're really good at home. They beat us in the things that we normally do well in. They out-rebounded us and that's the first time in a couple of months that we've been out-rebounded. Got to give them a lot of credit. We battled and found a way to keep it close after that big run they had. We couldn't find a way to get over the hump."

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