



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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### SDSU Men's Basketball vs. San Jose State – Press Conference Quotes

March 2, 2019

Head coach Brian Dutcher

#### Opening statement:

"I know it is coach talk but I told the guys after we got back from Utah State that I wanted to treat San Jose State like the Golden State Warriors. That's something only a coach would say, but I wanted our level of play to go up. I wanted us to play super hard and put everything into this game. I didn't want to take an opponent lightly, when Cal beat Washington that helped build my story, a team in the Pac-12 that hadn't won a game beat the first-place team. So as a coach you just try to get your team ready to play every game. So whatever that is motivation wise, you try to do it. I thought we came out ready to play. Maybe defensively, we worked hard on pressure and I didn't think that our pressure was that good for the first two or three minutes. I was up screaming, I was out of the coaching box. They put a piece of tape down and told me don't go any further than this. So I stayed in my coaching box but I thought we played hard. Rebounding was like the first game, though. Rebounding was the number one key to the game. We got beat at Utah State by 14 boards and you look up at halftime again and San Jose (State) has nine offensive rebounds and that's what they had at their place. So I think they're the third-best offensive rebounding team in the conference, so we knew it was going to be a chore. We were down a couple rebounds at the half and we end up only out-rebounding them by two, but we out-rebounded them. We know they're a team that gives you a lot of threes, so you have to shoot them. I thought Jordan (Schakel) them in early, Jeremy got a couple, he was struggling putting the ball in and he got a couple threes. Devin heated up in the second half, so, we made a lot of three-point shots. That's what San Jose (State) wants you to do. If you're missing, they have a chance but we made enough to expand the lead and then Nathan (Mensah) was great around the glass. When they went small, he really punished them on that on the offensive glass. He got a lot of put-backs and offensive rebounds to start the second half so I thought Nathan was really good. As far as sharing the ball, I think we had 32 baskets and 23 of them were assisted, which is a really good number. Our turnovers were 12, which is pretty good. So, the numbers were good. I'm sure we'll go back and look at the tape and find some moments that weren't that great. I told the kids at the end that I didn't like the way they were playing the last five or six minutes of the game, running down, passing the ball up. I told them I'm not going to over react to that, we all know what that looks like, we're all bright players, I'm not going to throw the clipboard. I want to play the right way all the way. So we got back to sharing the ball down the stretch and we're excited to finish the home stretch against Fresno (State) and send our seniors off. Jeremy Hemsley, Michael Sohikish, and Devin Watson with the kind of finish they deserve. With a big crowd in here to honor those seniors that have meant so much to the program and I'm excited for that opportunity to send them off in a game that's going to determine who is the third seed in the conference no matter what happens in our last game, the winner of the Fresno game is going to third seed in the conference tournament and the loser is going to be the fourth seed. So, I want to win the game because we haven't lost a conference home game in a long time. But the third or fourth seed, who knows how the conference is even going to shake out down the stretch between Nevada and Utah State. Nevada has a tough game

at Air Force and us to finish, so, there are no easy games in basketball so the only ones we are worried about is us. We have Fresno on Wednesday.

**On the team's assist numbers improving tonight in comparison to the last few games:**

"I think our starts in the UNLV and Utah State game we went like 3-for-15 or 3-for-14 at the start of those games, but were getting stops and we're running the break and taking quick bad shots. Whether we're pressing it to the basket through contact or we're pulling up and shooting jump shots. Like I told the guys, when those go in, everything is flowing and everything is great but when you miss them, then it's bad basketball. So it's such a fine line. I told them I don't want to take away their swagger and their ability to play, I can't say 'don't ever do this' but you have to do a better job of making better decisions. When you're on the break, what's a good shot, what's the time to pull it back, count numbers and become a better, smarter basketball player. I think if you tell them they have to pass it every time then all of a sudden they're turning down layups. So they know what good basketball is and I leave it to them to make a lot of good decisions which I thought they made better decisions today.

**On if that's easier to fix after a loss:**

"I thought we could have made a step forward against UNLV after that game because the start was so awful. Both teams couldn't make a shot, so both teams are running up and down the floor gassing the ball up, so I just thought against Utah State that we'd maybe have a better opportunity to drive around them. I thought we were better off the bounce. I thought UNLV was little bit better athletically. We could get around Utah State, but we couldn't. They kept a body in front of a body, so a lot of our offensive woes were on account of Utah State's really good defense."

**On how important Jeremy Hemsley's health is down the stretch:**

"Really important. They said if I needed him I could have out him in the end, but his knee was starting to tighten up a little bit in the last seven minutes of the game. I don't think he played the last seven or eight minutes. I didn't want to put him back in. We'll rest him. We have a day off tomorrow. We'll rest him whatever we have to rest him so he's healthy against Fresno and then Nevada. We were shorthanded today. The first half, they started running us because we're used to having Adam [Seiko] and Aguek [Arop] in there, but Seiko had a bad headache. HE couldn't play. Aguek had flu-like symptoms for two days. It started yesterday, but it wasn't real severe, so I thought up until game time he might be able to play, but he just couldn't play. I think we looked tired. We tried running up and down. We were running on offense but weren't running back on defense. I told them you have to run both ways. We looked tired, but I thought we caught our second wind in the second half and didn't give up as many transition baskets."

**On having Nathan Mensah and Joel Mensah on the court together:**

"Not having Aguek [Arop] pushed us up with Joel. He had to play some of those minutes. We were going to maybe play Nolan [Narain] and Nathan together at times, and let Nolan be the four-man, or if we had both out let Joel have some of those minutes, so we gave him some minutes. I think you saw with Joel is he's the first one on the floor for a loose ball. He wants to be so good. He plays so hard, so sometimes just playing hard is enough. I think he was on the floor twice for loose balls, diving for the ball. Sometimes you just want it so bad, and he wants it bad, so he's going to be a good player. Patience is a hard thing for a young kid, but he hadn't played in seven games, so he got out there today. I think he was excited to have the opportunity."

**On Jordan Schakel's threes off the bench:**

"I don't know how we won all those games without him. He's shooting the ball like crazy, so it's great having him back. He's such a threat from three, and we found him. Their choice was to sag off on drives – sag off on post touches. To our credit, we didn't force the shot. We kicked it out to the open shooters and moved it, so they were all assisted baskets – step-in threes, and those are the best ones to take. I liked the way we shared the ball out of the post."

### **On not winning the Mountain West title:**

"I didn't say it publicly, but I told the team going to Utah State — we want to win the conference. If we beat Utah State, we're a game back to them. Nevada gets beat, we got Nevada still on our schedule. We can win the conference, so up until the Utah State game our goal was to still win the regular season. I didn't put that out publicly because it would have taken a perfect storm to do it, but we were somewhat in control of our fate since we played Utah State and Nevada — the two teams in front of us. Granted it was on the road, so up until we lost to Utah State, in the back of our minds harboring thoughts that maybe we could find a way to sneak up and steal a piece of the title, and that didn't happen. Now we're trying to play for third and the highest seeding we can get."

### **On what he told the team after:**

"I told them after Utah State game we know we didn't play great, but I don't want them to lose the swagger we developed over a five-game win streak — seven out of eight. I didn't want to go in there and beat them down because we lost a game. I want them confident. This time of the year, confidence is as important as anything. You have to believe you're going to win games, so I don't want them in there thinking we played horrible. We're backsliding. We played a very good team. Obviously tonight, they beat Nevada at home in a tough environment. We're the only team to beat them in the last 13 games — Utah State — we're playing pretty good. I think on a neutral floor, we'll play with any of those teams."

### **On Michael Sohikish's performance:**

"I might start him against Fresno State. I haven't decided yet. He's pretty good. Michael is a good player. I don't want to tip it off to Justin Hutson. I don't want him getting a scouting report for Michael Sohikish, but he might be surprised. I might have Michael in there. I haven't decided yet."

### **On five guys with double figures:**

"Balanced scoring. I liked that. I like sharing the ball. Nathan — we went to him a little bit. He got a lot off the glass, but we threw it inside a couple times to him, and he was effective. We played the right way offensively. Like I said, at the seven-minute or six-minute mark, I thought we ran down and took some awful shots on the break. I told them that. I'm not going to throw my clipboard over, but you know that's not the right way to play."

### **On his visible frustration in the first half:**

"Yeah. Maybe at that timeout I did. I just tried to get them to pressure the ball more. Like I said, we told them the game plan, and I didn't feel like we were picking up full court and we weren't into the game the way I wanted it at the very start, so I got a little animated at the start. I don't know if it had an effect or not. I know it wore me out. I don't know if they got the message or not, but I was tired."

### **Senior guard Jeremy Hemsley**

#### **On team's shooting:**

"It was just a feel, like I said we watch film and I think, what did we start last game? I think 3-of-15 or something crazy. It was just shot selection. I think we took better shots. We played to what the defense gave us. It was a lot of open threes and I think we did a good job at just not forcing things and just playing to our advantage and we did a good job at that. When we don't force the ball or force shots I think we're a good team. I think it's just flow and I think that's what we did tonight."

#### **On being back at home:**

"Beautiful, because our conference is hard man. We go places I probably would have never been, never in my life if I wasn't here playing in this conference. I would have never ever been to Laramie, Wyoming or Air Force in Colorado. Our conference is hard man so coming home is always a good feeling for sure, every time."

#### **On his streak of nine consecutive games with a block ending tonight:**

"I think they knew because there were a few times on the fast break where they just backed it out. I was for sure going to go for the block, but that's a cool streak to have. I've never done something like that before so that's cool. It's really all about timing, just being a defender and playing hard. It's not really something I think about out there but I'm sad to see it come to an end."

### **On Michael Sohikish's playing time tonight:**

"It's crazy man. There have been times when I've walked in the gym on a Sunday, early in the morning thinking I'm going to be the first one in there, and he had already beat me to it, sweating in there like two hours deep already. That dude's a worker. I don't think there's anybody that I've seen that can outwork him, he just doesn't stop. So it's cool to see that. It's cool to see that hard work pays off. Mike never complains, you'll never see him with a frown on his face. He always just neutral. He loves being after no matter if you're talking trash to him. I've tried to get in his head plenty of times and he'll never say anything back. He just loves to be out there. So seeing a guy like that who just works so hard, because he was here when I got here so I've seen his transformation. He was a manager when I got here so to see him on the court tonight making threes and making passes is really nothing new because he cooks us in practice all the time. You've seen it. He does it all the time so it's amazing to see that. I know he's happy and I'm happy for him."

### **On the team's free throw shooting:**

"Me personally I was bad. I was shooting like Shaq on the free throw line, but we just have to shoot. We just have to get in the gym and do it. There's games like that. I went one for five and that's embarrassing, to be honest, but you just have games like that sometimes. I'm glad we did it against a team like this, not to disrespect them because they're a good team, they play hard, but I'd rather get it out right now than let it be in a game against Nevada or Fresno (State) or something like that. We just have to get in the gym and shoot more free throws."

### **On if free throw shooting was the biggest concern:**

"No, I wouldn't say so. I would say that it's just us being more consistent on defense and getting back in transition. I don't think the free throw shooting is anything to be worried about."

### **On stretch of fewer assists than turnovers:**

"When you go games with fewer assists than you do turnovers that's not good at all. That was a point of emphasis that Coach Dutcher made. We wanted to move the ball and we wanted to make and take threes and we did a good job of that. When we move the ball and it's flowing and the ball isn't sticky we're a good team. That's something we strive to do every game."

### **On paying attention to seeding in Mountain West:**

"No, it might sound bad but I just don't. I'm only worried about us. I'm not looking at any other team or any other players."

### **Freshman forward Nathan Mensah**

#### **On his performance tonight:**

"It felt great. We've been on the road for so long and I've been struggling on the road so anytime we play a home game it boosts my confidence up a little bit. So I think it helps me take the next step for when we go on the road."

#### **On playing with Joel Mensah:**

"It felt like back in high school days, like our freshman year. It felt really great to be back on the floor with him and I think as time goes on hopefully we will play more together."

## **San Jose State Head Coach Jean Prioleau**

### **On tonight's game:**

"You know, teams are a lot different playing at home than away. San Diego State was really good today. They've been playing really well as of late, and I think we've got their best shot tonight on all fronts – offensively, defensively, rebounding. They only beat us on the boards by two, but they still won the boards. They scored it really easy. Multiple guys scored. At our place, [Jalen] McDaniels and [Devin] Watson beat us, but tonight all of those guys were making shots. It was a learning process for us. I was really happy with Zach Chappell. He had five assists. He had no turnovers. He had 14 points I think, so that was great for a freshman to be able to do that, and he's only going to get better.

### **On San Diego State's depth:**

"Coach [Brian] Dutcher does a great job. I'm sure those guys have been getting in the gym and shooting a lot more, and those guys answered. We were going to try and limit [Jalen] McDaniels the best we could and force those other guys to try and beat us, and they were able to do that tonight – hats off. We also tried to stay single coverage and try to take away threes, but then they were just driving to the basket as well. They had both things going on, and we weren't able to offset that at all."

### **On tonight's rebounding:**

"We had a couple situations where we got offensive rebounds and we couldn't just put it back in or maybe they slapped the ball away from us, but conversely we actually did the same thing to them. I just think we couldn't make shots, or we just couldn't make plays enough. We couldn't make enough plays on offense or defense – however you want to call it. That's basically what it came down to, and we have the same team coming back. We have a lot of work to do. Seasons not over. We still have two more games, and we still have the conference tournament, but I told our guys – I was like, it was probably a high-end level game that you will see in the semifinals and finals of our conference tournament – in terms of level of play.

### **On San Diego State's defense:**

"They were good. They were able to guard us. They were able to kind of still guard us and stay close without fouling. I thought they did a really good job of that, and they were athletic enough and long enough to bother us when we took a shot.

**-SDSU-**