



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

GOAZTECS.COM | @GOAZTECS | @AZTECSPR | #GOAZTECS

### **SDSU Men's Basketball vs. Fresno State – Preview Quotes**

**March 4, 2019**

#### **San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher**

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

"Where'd the season go, guys? One home game left. You're in the middle of it and you wonder when it's ever going to end and then you get to the end and wonder what happened to all the time. Where'd it go? Excited to send the seniors off on Senior Night. Jeremy Hemsley, Devin Watson, Michael Sohikish have all meant so much to the program, all been a part of hanging banners in the rafters. They can bring their kids back someday and show them all the great things they've done here. Hopefully it's just the start of another chance to hang another one. We're going to try to finish the season strong. We have a big game with Fresno on Wednesday, and then obviously end the season at Nevada, and regardless of what happens in either one of those games, our success for the season will be based on three games in Las Vegas next week. We have to get better and be at full health, be mentally feeling good about ourselves leading into Vegas and these last two games will have a lot to do with that."

##### **On the team's consistency this season:**

"I think we are playing a lot better. Obviously, not many teams are going to win at Utah State, as Nevada found out last game there. I think [Utah State] has won 13 or 14 games, with the only loss being to us, so I'd like another shot at them on a neutral floor, obviously. There are a lot of good teams in this conference that have a chance to sneak in there and win three or four games, and that's the beauty of conference tournaments. We've gotten better because our defense has gotten better. You look at the conference statistics for the 16 conference games [we've played] and we're number one in defense in points allowed, we're number one in defense in field goal percentage allowed, so we're playing good defense. Now, if we can continue to rebound the ball and finish possessions with rebounding, then we'll be a tough team to beat in the conference tournament. Rebounding has to continue to be the point of emphasis. I like the way we shared the ball the last game. We got off the offensive snide. We struggled offensively against UNLV and Utah State, and seemed to have a little better rhythm against San Jose. Had our assists back up with 23 assists. We have to continue to work at both ends of the floor to be at our best."

##### **On how the team can manage any emotions heading into playing against Fresno State Wednesday:**

"First of all, Fresno has always been, or has turned themselves into a rival when Rodney Terry was there. They had beat us I think the last two times in our building. They've been a good basketball team, a 20-win team. Justin (Hutson) has done a good job going in there and building on what Rodney has done, and has them playing really high-level basketball. It's been a competitive game, it will continue to be, and I'm looking for an exciting one on Wednesday."

##### **On if he's worried emotions will get too high:**

“Emotions will be high because it will be those seniors stepping on the floor for the last time, and that will mean something. Obviously, the rivalry with Fresno has been good. We got them in the conference tournament last year and they beat us twice in the regular season, so it’s been a competitive game over the last three or four years. That will be an emotional aspect to it. We’re playing for the three seed, basically. The winner gets the three seed. We don’t have the drama we had last year where we had to win our final two games to get out of the play-in game. We’re out of the play-in game and we’d like to finish as high as we can in the standings, but sometimes you wish for that and then you get a bad matchup. Everybody knows, whether it’s the NCAA tournament or the conference tournaments, these games, a lot of the time, are about matchups. Sometimes you have to be careful what you wish for, or maybe once you finish third, you say, ‘Man, I wish we finished fourth.’ You’re looking at teams you match up favorably with. That won’t be decided until the last game of the year. Obviously we will compete at a high level and try to win our last two games, and then hope we get the kind of matchups where we can make a run in this conference tournament.”

**On if he’s thought ahead to how he will approach the Nevada game:**

“No, I don’t think I’ll rest anybody. I might switch up the game plan, even though we beat them the first game, to try to maybe look at a few things to say, ‘I’m going to try these now because in a week, I might be seeing them in the conference tournament, so let me see maybe what the zone looks like against them.’ We intended to play some zone against them in the first game, and didn’t. Make ourselves play zone against them some. Switch up defenses, maybe pick up a little full-court, just to get a look maybe knowing that it’s not for a conference title and we want to win the game, but maybe throw some things at them that I can say, going into the conference tournament, I can count on this one week from now.”

**On his pride in Jeremy Hemsley considering the challenges he faces last season:**

“Jeremy is one of my favorites. He just is such a joy to coach because he plays hard all the time. He wants to win more than anything. I said it at the start of the year, Jeremy brings such joy to practice and games. It’s not just games; sometimes practice can be a drag, but he’s out there all the time with a smile on his face. He seems like he’s enjoying every minute of his senior year. As a coach, you always take great pride in that, when you see a kid who has been through the program for four years and is turning into everything you’d hoped he’d be—a top 10 scorer, a guy that’s won you titles, a guy that is a great leader and is enjoying every minute of his San Diego State experience.”

**On Devin Watson’s growth at San Diego State:**

“Yeah, Devin has grown as a player. He’s hard to guard. He’s one of the smartest players on the floor at all times. The hard thing is that it’s hard being a scoring point guard because you have to pick and choose when you score. He’s a gifted passer, but sometimes he has to turn on his offensive game, and sometimes, you think, ‘Well, was that a good shot or a bad shot?’ But, I can’t have him second-guessing how he plays. I want him to be aggressive, I want him to be confident, and I don’t want him saying, ‘Should I have shot that one? Should I have passed that one?’ He studies his game hard. He studies all of his shot attempts and how he plays the game. Sometimes I see adjustments in his game from practice to games just because he’s seen it himself. Some players you have to tell, ‘Hey, I think I would try this.’ Devin watches himself play, he self-evaluates and he usually makes the right decisions on his own as to what he needs to do from game to game, and I’m very much appreciative of that.”

**On what he feels going into this stretch of the season:**

“It’s mostly pressure. I mean, we’ve been to the NCAA tournament seven of the last nine years. We want to go to the NCAA tournament. The only way to go there is to win three games in Las Vegas. That’s what we’re going to try to do. We want to be an NCAA tournament team. We’ve been there more than anybody in this conference, so we know what it takes, we know how important it is and if that’s pressure, that’s the kind of pressure we welcome in the program.”

## **Senior Guard Jeremy Hemsley**

### **On his final season winding down:**

"It's crazy, just knowing that it's going to be my last time playing in Viejas. I've thought about it a lot and I don't know — I'm not sure how I'm going to feel when I have to walk on the court. But it's crazy. It's been a fun four years, I wouldn't take nothing back. The ups and the downs — I think I needed both of them to be the person that I am now and be the player that I am now. Like I said, I loved it, all four years and it's crazy that it's coming to an end. I'm growing and I just have to keep moving forward and I'm excited for the next chapter in my life."

### **On ability to stay positive throughout the course of the season:**

"I'm very proud of that. This summer I put in just as much work mentally as I did physically. I'm thankful every day that I feel way better and that I don't feel the way that I felt last year. It's a process, and I worked hard for both, mental and physical. So I'm glad that I was just stay clear in the head the whole time."

### **On his plans after this year:**

"I for sure want to keep playing basketball, obviously. But when I think about my future and 10-15 years down the line, I think about me just doing stuff that is bigger than basketball. I feel like I can help a lot of people. I feel like what I've gone through with my mental issues and dealing with stuff like that, being on this platform I could just help people who have gone on through the same thing. Just be a voice for people who feel like they can't speak up on stuff like that. I want to help people and I know I can do it through this game of basketball. This platform allows you to reach a lot of different people. Basketball has always been a dream and it will continue to be a dream. But, while I'm here and alive on this planet, I want to help people and I want to just put a smile on people's faces. I think basketball gives me the opportunity to do that and whatever comes with that is what I'll be happy with."

### **On upcoming game against Fresno State:**

"We want to win. It's not anything personal or like we hate them, we just — I don't want Hut (Justin Hutson) coming here and beating us. Period. And I know our teammates feel the same way, even the ones that didn't get the chance to play under him. At the end of the day, it's all love, but when we're on the court, there is no love. I think we all know that and I think Hut and those guys over there know that. Once the ball goes up, it's war and it doesn't matter what's going on or what relationship we had when I was 18, 19 years old. It's my last year in college and it's going to be my last home game. I'm ready for whatever and I'm ready for whoever, so that's the mindset I have, personally."

## **Senior Guard Devin Watson**

### **On Michael Sohikish's role on the team:**

"Definitely, he's very tough. He doesn't back down and that's the most I like about him. He definitely pushed me, just the fact that he doesn't back down and we got into it at practice and he doesn't back down. He's very tough and he's been working hard."

### **On Michael Sohikish's increased playing time lately:**

"It's cool. Last game he had a couple buckets and we went crazy on the bench, the crowd went crazy. It's just the hard work he's been putting in. He's just been staying focused about the right things."

### **On his ability to play with a chip on his shoulder:**

“Just the grind that I put and all the hard work, you know, just all the sacrifices my parents made for me and how I’m here now. Just no one knows what I’ve been through, and that’s why I have a chip on my shoulder and keep it on my shoulder. I’m just going to continue the grind. It just keeps me working hard and just being the best I can be at all times.”

**On Jeremy Hemsley:**

Just going back, when I first got here, me and Jeremy had countless talks about everything—faith, hope, success, what we were trying to do. So I’ve been here through the ups and downs of what he went through and how he is. He’s just a tough guy, he’s a soldier. He didn’t let it phase him, he got a little side-tracked a little bit but you’ll see he’s overcome any obstacle that he’s dealt with here. I’m proud of him and I know he’s going to be fine with whatever goes on. He’s going to have a great game on Wednesday and I’m proud of him.”

**On his plans after this year:**

“Definitely keep playing basketball, but just take things one step at a time. When I get to it, sit down and discuss things with my family and stuff like that and just figure it out.”

**On emotions heading into the Fresno State game:**

“When the ball goes up for that 40 minutes, I won’t be thinking about anything else. It’s going to be a very emotional game, obviously. Senior night, last time playing in the arena. But as far as the game, like Jeremy said, it’s going to be war.”

**On the last game against Fresno State being motivation for Wednesday:**

It’s definitely going to be motivation. There was a lot of stuff that happened that was sidetracking. But, at the end of the day, we lost, so when they come here on Wednesday, we definitely got something for them.”

**Senior Guard Michael Sohikish**

**On his experience at SDSU:**

“Well, it’s been an amazing one, personally. Coming to an Aztec program that I knew and loved growing up, I came to a team that was seasoned, a veteran team that started two seniors and three juniors that year that I became a manager under Steve Fisher. We were an at-large bid that year, won the conference—that was the Aztec basketball I knew and loved. I was able to grow, learn and be mentored by some great coaches over the years. Year after I year I got better, became a better basketball player, a better person and more importantly [that allowed me to be here].”

**On what he’s been able to teach fellow seniors Jeremy Hemsley and Devin Watson:**

“I haven’t been able to teach these guys anything. They’ve taught me a lot. Personally, I got a lot better when Devin came because we’re both not the biggest guys on the court, we’re not the quickest most athletic guys. Devin’s one of the smartest players I’ve known and watching him play at his size—our size—that definitely added to my game. I can definitely attribute a lot of my success to his talent that I was able to watch over the years.”

**On Jeremy Hemsley:**

“His career here—our career here, really—wasn’t the most linear one. There was a lot of ups, a lot of downs, and when you go through those downs you have to be mentally tough to get back up there. Jeremy’s taken care of himself mentally and physically which is a huge reason why we’re starting to rise back where we used to be and where we need to be now.”

**On his plans after this year:**

"Personally, my playing career will probably be over when this season is over, but that doesn't mean I have to stray away from basketball, but then again I do have a few options I have to consider. Whether I want to go into my engineering career straight on, go to grad school, or get into coaching, but I'm sure we're all familiar with that we can have a plan but most of the time, life never goes according to plan. It's all about making your opportunities and picking and choosing which one you want to go with."

**On his biggest takeaway during his time at SDSU:**

"Just the atmosphere that San Diego State can offer. Just the love, it's so warm, that embrace is really hard to put into words. Especially The Show and the fan base we have here at San Diego State, and especially being from that fan base growing up. I was a fan back when Lorenzo (Wade) first started playing here and it's ironic that I get to work with him on a daily basis. It comes full circle. But definitely that embrace, that warmth that this crowd brings – that this fan base brings – is something special and I'll cherish [it] forever."

**-SDSU-**