



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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Utah State at San Diego State Postgame Quotes Steve Fisher Court at Viejas Arena | San Diego, Calif. Feb. 1, 2020

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening statement:

"What an incredible atmosphere tonight. One that Aztec fans, coaches and players will remember for a long, long time. We put up on the board today a saying we had up on Thanksgiving when we played Creighton in Vegas: 'Mental toughness, extra effort.' It's a Coach Fisher saying and I thought it was appropriate. The mental toughness was not about the opponent, but not getting caught up in this atmosphere and having the ability to focus on the task at hand. I thought that the kids did a great job at that. We were down eight at half and our mental toughness was great then too. We did what we always do: we find a hot hand and we ride it. They knew Matt Mitchell was rolling and instead of me having to call a play every time for Matt, good teams know who's playing well and they find a way to get it to them. He had a magnificent game for us."

On Matt Mitchell's performance tonight:

"Matt was rolling. We've seen him do that before. His freshman year he had a game with 31 points where he hit something like seven threes, so Matt's more than capable and he's a hard guy to guard when he's playing like that. You can see his growth. He's so much more balanced when he attacks now. He's not shooting off-balance. He's always balanced (when he shoots) and that's a credit to the work he's doing in the gym on his own to improve his skillset. That's what all these kids do. It was a hard-fought win and it feels good to know we have a bye week after it. We'll have a chance to rest legs for a little bit and then continue to try and get better because we're 23-0 but we have room to get better."

On connection between Mitchell and Kawhi Leonard:

"What a great night for an inland empire kid to have a great game – the Kawhi Leonard jersey hanging."

On Leonard visiting:

"Kawhi was near the bench start of the second half and I said, 'Go get a uniform on, Kawhi, we might need you,' and told me, 'Just win the game,' and I said 'Yes sir!' It was fun to watch Matt put that performance on for Kawhi. What a great crowd. Once we got rolling, the momentum just snowballed because the crowd was so dynamic and made it so loud and so hard on Utah State. Credit to the Aztec crowd. They brought great energy that the team fed on."

On secret to success on recruiting Kawhi:

"Just build relationships as best as you can. If you spend the time to build a relationship (with him), you (will) know he's a quiet kid. If you go in there one time and try to recruit him and he doesn't say anything, you could leave and say, 'Well, the kid's not interested in us, he didn't say anything.' But if you stick to it, you realize that's his personality. When you embrace it, you say, 'This is a rare kid that doesn't boast about his game, he just plays his game.' He liked us, he liked the fact that we were coming to see him and he liked the fact that we were there from the start. We were both rewarded. We were rewarded with a wonderful player and he was rewarded with a wonderful team and coaches to play with. So it was just a joy to see him tonight, I haven't seen him in a while. It was great to see him for just that small moment to start the second half."

On Kawhi's success:

"Well, I thought he was going to be a great player, and I called back and told Coach (Fisher) 'I think this kid's got a chance to play in the NBA'. But nowhere in your wildest dreams do you think he's going to be the best player in the world, I thought he had potential. I thought he had a good work ethic, but that's understated-- he had the rare double: talent and an incredible work ethic. Some guys waste their talent, he's taken full advantage of the talent he's been given, and worked harder than anybody I've ever seen. So it's no surprise the success he's enjoying and we were glad that we had him here for the two years we did."

On Kawhi's village:

"Yeah, he's a gem of our city. He lives here, he decided to buy a house in San Diego. So, he's up in LA, but in the offseason he's here in San Diego, because he loves the city. It's great to see the city embrace him. It's so appropriate that all he said to me was, 'Hey, just win,' (because) that's all he ever wants to do- win. He wants to win. He's the complete (type of) winner and all he's concerned about is winning, so when he said, 'Just win,' I said, 'Yes, sir, we're going to try.'

On approach for upcoming bye week:

"We're going to fully prep for Air Force. We're going to prep really hard because they're a hard guard, they run the Princeton offense and they're unique. But we're going to give (the team) some time off, we'll take tomorrow- I don't know the last time we've had a day off. Obviously, it doesn't matter the day of the week, we work every day (even when they are given the NCAA regulation day off). But if it's a midweek day off, they (the team) go to class and they're doing their stuff anyway. So, tomorrow is going to be the, I think the first actual day that they can stay at home, we can stay at home, and actually put our feet up and get some rest. I can't remember the last time that's happened. So, I hope they all can just enjoy the Super Bowl, watch the Super Bowl and get away from basketball for a day. Then the decision was, 'Do we give them Monday off, (give them) back-to-back days? Or are we going to go light on Monday and Tuesday, take Wednesday off, and go Thursday and Friday?' I think that's what we'll do, we'll give them two days off out of the next six and try to rest (their) legs. (And when) We're on the floor, we're going to be careful. We're going to do just enough that we need to get done to continue to improve as a team."

On he carries if lucky pennies:

"Yes I do (carry them), and (I wear) my lucky socks. Although I lost two of my pennies, I'm going to tell you that. I lost two of them, but just to be honest I (usually) carry three in each pocket. But I lost two at the Pit somehow, but we still managed to win, so we're on a steak with four pennies instead of six."

San Diego State Junior Forward Matt Mitchell

On second half streak:

"My teammates found me. I just felt like I was wide open sometimes. My teammates found me, that's it, that's all I have to say. I just put the ball in the hoop."

On any similar streaks:

"Freshman year was the last time, I think I went for 31. My teammates found me then."

On Kawhi Leonard's night:

"There's definitely a significance there, me having a big night on Kawhi's big night. That's definitely very special. I'm happy that I was able to show out tonight. At the same time, it's a team sport and my teammates found me tonight. Another night it would've been another one of my teammates."

On Leonard's influence in choosing SDSU:

"It's a great influence especially for me coming from where I did in the Inland Empire. He's the biggest idol next to Reggie Miller in the Inland Empire. It's a great influence for me to come here and be able to show out tonight, as well as just be able to be in the school's presence and live under Kawhi's name."

San Diego State Senior Guard KJ Feagin

On if he noticed when Leonard walked in:

"I noticed because I was out of the game. It was during a timeout. It's hard to miss him when he walks into the gym. I saw everything. I was glad I was able to see him get introduced by the crowd. I didn't see halftime obviously but I did see him walk in."

On Utah State's 14-0 run:

"We just came in at halftime and we admitted that we weren't making them play our brand of basketball. They were playing their brand of basketball and it was working for them. They hit about seven threes in the first half and they only hit six per game in conference. So they were rolling and I just told them (the team) that we have to get back to doing what we do. We have to impose our will on them (Utah State) and (so) we came out in the second half and fed off the energy of the crowd. We played our game and we came out victorious."

On Mitchell's performance:

"I'm not surprised, he's a great player. He's a stud. He works just as hard as me or anyone else on the team. When anyone on the team gets going, I'm not surprised. If any of us on the team need to do the bulk of the scoring, we've shown that we can do that. We have a group of guys that are all talented and all (are) sacrificing for the team. He (Mitchell) got us going and he willed us to the win tonight."

On decision to transfer to SDSU:

"It was almost a year ago when I took my visit here, and the crowd was just like that when (San Diego State) upset Nevada last year. I told a reporter earlier, it's just about everything coming full circle for me. Last year I was a spectator, but now I'm a part of something that's bringing this crowd (o life). Like I told the team before, this is all a product of our good work. They're (the fans) all here to see us put on a show. Like I always say, I know I sound like a broken drum, but it's just special to be part of something like this. I'm going to value it every day and I'm just thankful."

On second half defense:

"We didn't let them (Utah State) get comfortable. First half, they were very comfortable. I think that's why (Sam) Merrill was picking us apart off the pick and roll. He wasn't scoring like he usually does. He hit a couple tough threes in the first half but he was really picking us apart with his vision. We made the game tough on him, we wanted to get the ball out of his hands and make other players on the team be playmakers. We were going to live with tough twos. They took a lot of tough twos and they only made two threes in the second half. When you limit them to not a lot of three pointers and a lot of tough twos, you'll win a game most of the time."

Utah State Head Coach Craig Smith

Opening Statement:

"Well, congrats to San Diego State, they played a great game. Obviously, they're very good. You're not top five in the country by accident, and they're especially good on their home floor. It was a great college atmosphere and a great environment to honor Kawhi Leonard. We had a really good first half, we play poised and under control and really controlled the game. They (SDSU) got off to a good start and we really responded well to hang in there because it could have gotten away quick. We had a nice lead in first half after we were seven-for-10 from the three, which was the difference in the first half, and they flipped the script certainly in the second half. You knew they were going to have a great run, all great teams do. (Because of that knowledge) We can't have too many errors defensively. Certainly [Matt] Mitchell just took over the second half with 24 points. He's a very good player. When he starts getting going like that he is a load to stop, he's a mismatch nightmare. So quick, but yet so powerful. We had a very difficult time getting them under control but you know when they make 14 threes, go 14-for-32 and you combine that with 16-for-19 from the free throw line, that's a disastrous combination and that's certainly a lot to overcome."

On the difference between halves:

"The first half we shot it well, (but in the) second half we had too many empty possessions. We had great looks, but we just didn't make them pay on wide open looks. They (SDSU) went down (after that) but again, you know that the three ball makes a huge difference in the game, and when

you are 16-for-19 from the free throw line, go 14-for-32 (from three), and you get the crowd into it, everyone starts going nuts. The other difference was they got five offensive rebounds (in the second half) and we held them to one offensive rebound in the first half. Wetzell by himself had five offensive rebounds and those are such energy plays. That tip dunk was a huge play, that was not a backbreaker, but that certainly got the crowd ignited. We'll get better from this and we will learn from this. We're trending in the right way, I know that might sound odd after a difficult loss like this, but they're very good. We'll grow from this game."

On impact of Kawhi Leonard's Jersey Retirement ceremony:

"What a great night for all of basketball and certainly for San Diego State. That guy [Kawhi Leonard] personally is my favorite player in the NBA. He's a guy that we talk about to our basketball campers, little kids, about the growth that he's made from being a freshman and so on and so forth but we didn't hype that up, they (the Utah State players) knew all about that stuff. You get really excited when you play a great team that San Diego State is, in a hostile environment. All kids (that) grow up loving basketball want to play in this kind of a venue and in this type of a game. The guys knew what was going on, [Kawhi brought] maybe a little more fanfare, but we were just excited for this opportunity."

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