



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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### San Diego State Press Conference Quotes Feb. 5, 2020

#### San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

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

"I was walking in and I told Matt I'm not used to sharing the stage (during press conferences), but I'm sure it was (going to be with) the guy that scored 28, so maybe he's offended he sitting up here with me! What a great game against Utah State; Kawhi Leonard's jersey going up, the atmosphere and a win, so it was a perfect storm for the Aztecs. Now we have a bye week. We're trying to rest legs, at the same time, when we're on the floor, (we need to) concentrate and try to get better as a team. Next, we go to Air Force. They've been struggling, but we've been there enough to know what that is. All we have to do is look and see who they beat in their place this year Utah State, Boise (State) – two of the better teams in this conference. So, we're going to have to play a really good game and a really smart game to come out of the Air Force Academy with a victory on Saturday."

##### **On what makes Air Force a difficult opponent:**

"You don't know what you're going to get. You might go in there and there will be a full house, or you might go in there and it will be empty, plus it's at altitude. They're smart; they play hard. They've got seniors. (Lavelle) Scottie, (Ryan) Swan and Sid Tomes are all seniors that have won a lot of games there and now they are in a tough stretch, but they're not going to give in to that. They're going to come out and try to put the first loss on the Aztecs. If they were playing a team maybe equal in the standings to them, (that team) might not see the same team we're going to see. We're undefeated and people can resurrect their season with a win over us, so we know what we're going to see when we go in there Saturday."

"Their coaches don't get them until practice. They can't bring them in and do extra shooting and do all that, these kids are committed to the Academy to military service and to basketball, so they're as hard of a working group is there is in the country. We have great respect for them and what they do and how they prepare, not only for their careers, but also how they prepare to play basketball. They have our utmost respect and we know what we're going to see on Saturday, which is a very inspired team."

##### **On how successful three-point shooting can make a team competitive:**

"I always tell the (players), if you're the better team, the great equalizer is the three-point shot. We work really hard to take away the three from teams that we feel like are struggling. The best way to get healthy is to throw in threes and they shoot a lot of them. They run the Princeton offense, so they're either back-cutting for layups or they're stepping out and shooting threes. The games they win, they make them. But the games they lose you look and say, well how did they lose that game? They get the exact same shots but they don't go in, they had a cold shooting night, so if we hit them on the wrong night when they're making a lot of them, it could make for a long evening."

##### **On how much he considers seeding in potential success:**

"I don't look to the NCAA Tournament at all. I tell these guys we want to hang a banner. We want to win the Mountain West. We have a four game lead with six games to go, so we have to win enough games to know that the banner's going up. Once that banner's up, then we can move to the next thing and say, 'I feel with a Mountain West title, we're pretty assured of being into the NCAA Tournament.' We'll start looking at that then. That's how I am. I don't know how the guys are, but they better be wired like me!"

**On keeping the team focused amongst national attention:**

"They're pretty focused. I don't have to go overboard keeping them focused, and that's reflected in practice. That's the thing you guys don't get to see. I get to get out on the practice floor and see how hard they're working. They're locked in at practice, so then I have great comfort they're going to be locked in for the game. If practice starts to slip, then I'll start to question where their heads are at and if they're getting ahead of themselves, but this team has not got ahead of itself all year. It's been singularly focused on the next game and that's something that we have a feel for as coaches and we haven't seen it, so we don't worry about it because they come to work every day."

**On balancing rest and work during the bye week:**

"We've taken a lot of time off and I think it's a good thing. We took Sunday off completely, Monday we just did individual work, Tuesday we went pretty hard and today is a complete off day. Hopefully they're not doing anything. We told them, we don't think it's in their interest to even get in the gym and shoot, but yet when I walked in the gym, I saw (Adam) Seiko in there and I saw Malachi (Flynn) in there. That's their nature, so I'm not sure if they'll all be in there now. I want them to rest their legs, but hopefully they have a little bit of intelligence where they are resting enough, and then we'll go really hard the next two days leading into Air Force."

**On if the bye week will disrupt winning momentum:**

"I don't think so. I think it's good to rest legs. I think we're playing a pretty good level right now and I don't think that'll drop. The opponent may step up, like we talked about; all of a sudden, they make 12 threes and we're going to be in for a long night. Sometimes you can contest them, sometimes they still go in. Utah State is a perfect example. We played really hard, but they made seven threes in the first half. They were making six a game in the conference. So then they made two in the second half and we were able to get it under control and get a lead and win the game. But if they made seven more threes the second half, I think we all know we'd be in trouble. We have to continue to play hard and defend at a high level, and hope we don't run into a hot team that no matter what we do those shots are going in."

**On controlling the pace of a game:**

"We don't give a whole lot of easy stuff up. We take care of the ball. We're tough to get on a roll against because we guard hard and we take care of the ball. So we usually are pretty much in control of the pace and tempo of the game. Whether we win it or not, we're going to have to make plays just like the other team, but usually the pace and tempo of the game doesn't get away from us very often."

**On Nathan Mensah update:**

"He's doing individual work and non-contact drills, so he's out there. Our hope is still to have him back. When that is, I'm not sure. We're hoping to have him back, if not by the Mountain West Tournament, then the NCAA Tournament."

## San Diego State Junior Forward Matt Mitchell

**On a moment that stuck with him from Saturday's game in which he scored 28 points:**

"I think being able to live in that moment for me was great and surreal. It was fun to be in [the moment] and I am glad that I was able to live it and go through that experience. At the same time, we have another game on Saturday and it is time to move on."

**On being in "the zone":**

"I think the last time was my freshman year, when I had 31 (versus Eastern Illinois). I think that was the last time that I went on a streak like that, where I was hot to that point."

**On looking ahead to the NCAA Tournament:**

"Of course, you think about it and it is something that you want to achieve. It is a goal. But at the same time, as a team, we talk about taking it one game at a time as well. [We] try not to get ahead of ourselves and try not to lose focus. Our focus is to win the Mountain West Title."

**On how challenging it is to stay in the moment:**

"It is very hard. It is hard to stay in the moment and not get ahead of yourself and think about the future and what you could do within these next few months. At the same time, we have to stay locked in and stay focused and stay together."

**On how big of a deal a #1 seed would be:**

"I think it would be a big deal. I think that we would feel (we had) achieved (something special), but at the same time, I do not think that we would feel like we were finished. We would feel that we still had something to prove. We are not done yet."

**On whether he would prefer a higher seed or closer location:**

"I think location would definitely be good. But at the same time, I do not think we would have a preference as a team. I do not know about Coach (ditcher), but I think we definitely like to play on the road. We like to go into other (people's arenas), where they might have strong crowds. Playing on the East Coast and go in there and try to get a ring (would be fun)."

**On if the reality check of trailing to Utah State helped the team:**

"Definitely, I think we were challenged early in the season against Iowa and having to claw back. At the same time, I think it was good for us to have that adversity again, just to have that reality check and say that we are undefeated, but we are not invincible. We have to keep putting our heads down and keep going to work and following the game plan."

**On what the environment is like on campus:**

"It's really good. The environment is crazy. People constantly want to talk to you and tell you that you are doing a good job. It is fun to live in this moment and experience that and have a full city behind you."

**On what makes Air Force a tough opponent:**

"Like Coach said, (Lavelle) Scottie and (Ryan) Swan are their motors. They are what make (Air Force) go. They are very good at what they do, especially with the offense they run. It is very difficult and very different. We play an entirely different style of defense, not in our gaps. (We are) trying to protect and check their cuts and backdoors and trying to stay with them. I do not think that it is anything that we are incapable of doing and achieving and we will be right when the game plan comes out."

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