



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State Weekly Press Conference Quotes Feb. 15, 2021

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement

"Well, we had a day off yesterday so I'm excited to get back on the floor start our prep for Fresno State. Obviously, we know it's going to be a challenging series. They've been very good at home this year (and) they're getting better. They had as long a pause as anybody at the start of the year, and it seems like they're getting some rhythm about them and (they're) playing good basketball. So, we're looking forward to the challenge and trying to see if we go up there and play well in Fresno."

On the play and development of Lamont Butler:

"Lamont just continues to get better, more comfortable. A lot of these guys, they just try to please the coaches to start. They're trying to do what (they) think that we want them to do instead of just playing with some freedom. Now that he's got comfortable, he kind of knows what the game plan is (and) what's expected of him. He's just going out and playing, and so I think he's a lot more aggressive going to the basket. He finds his teammates when they're open. It's just (being) comfortable on the floor and Lamont's done a good job of practicing hard and making the most of his game minutes."

On if there was any effort to schedule a game during the team's eight-day break:

"I directly talked to Kelvin Sampson at Houston. They needed games and they continue to lose games. Their Memphis game was postponed, but we could not find a date that worked for both of us. We were looking to maybe do something at the end of both our seasons, but I think they have makeup games they're going to be required to play, so that date has not worked out. Like I said, we want to play someone higher than us than in the NET. So that cuts the field down to 20-some teams and if those 20-some teams aren't available at this point, with our ranking and our NET ranking, we're probably not looking to play below us right now."

On what the team is doing in their current six-game win streak that they can use moving forward:

"Just an aggressiveness and attitude that we're going to attack to the basket, that we're going to be aggressive for ourselves. I think early in the year, we passed the ball to a fault and that's what coaches want to see. We don't want to see the opposite of that where everybody's trying to score every time they get it. I think we're picking and choosing our moments where the best play is for ourselves, not for a teammate. So, as we get better at that, all aspects of our offense continue to get better."

On the challenges Fresno State center Orlando Robinson presents:

"He's a first team all-conference type player. If you don't help on him at some level, he's going to score. So we have to decide where the help is going to come from and do a good job of trying to keep him from catching the ball in his sweet spot. Whether it's deep on the block or the elbow, (we've got to) try to make those catches harder, but Orlando is a very talented offensive player and he had a big game against us at their place. In our place, in the first game last year, he got into some first half foul trouble and then played well in the second half. We're going to have to pay extra attention to Orlando and make sure we do a good job on him."

On how the recent large margins of victory have allowed him to play his bench and specifically Lamont Butler and Keshad Johnson:

"You know I think Lamont and Keshad were playing minutes regardless, even in tight games. They're reliable players and we like them on the floor. So, I guess game-to-game, whoever's playing well in that particular game gets a majority of the minutes. It's good to see them get more game experience. You know Lamont is a freshman, Keshad is a sophomore and you can't replace experience. So hopefully all that experience over these last two weeks will help them down the stretch."

On the play of reigning Mountain West Player of the Week Jordan Schakel:

"Jordan stepped up when Matt (Mitchell) was injured and not playing. (He) provided us a lot more offensive spark and he did that with Matt on the floor, too. The thing that makes us dangerous is, we have a lot of good pieces. So, with Matt and Jordan on the floor together, it makes us really dangerous. It's good to see Jordan in his rhythm, playing with great confidence and hopefully that will continue down the stretch."

On the recent play of Nathan Mensah:

"Nathan's been great for us all year. I think he's the one player on our roster that struggled in the altitude at Utah State. He struggled some at Air Force (so) we played him in shorter stints. But Nathan is back at sea level, back on his home floor and has become a lot more productive again. Hopefully, playing in Fresno, playing at sea level, we'll see a very productive Nathan Mensah."

On why he thinks the recent games against Fresno State have been close contests:

"I think when (Fresno State head coach) Justin (Hutson) first got up there, he was probably more familiar with our personnel and things like that. We knew when Justin was here that he was a great defensive coach, so you're looking at two programs that play really hard at the defensive end. Points are hard to come by and both our games last year were fairly low scoring and a struggle to put points on the board. I would anticipate you'll see a lot of the same in this series, that points will be at a premium and if we could get in the 70s it'll probably be enough to win."

San Diego State Senior Guard Jordan Schakel

On the reasons for the close games between San Diego State and Fresno State in recent years:

"I think (coach Hutson's) teams always play extremely hard and they play really good defense. When you do that, you're going to have a great chance to win. So, we know what it's going to be, and what to expect in the game."

On the development of this team compared to the way last year's team came together:

"I think last year was just a different story. We had a lot of guys that came in scoring a lot of points at their previous schools, and we just kind of had to fit the pieces together as best we could. This year we have such an unselfish group of guys. We have to, as a group, be more aggressive and have more of an aggressive mindset. I think it's just a different type of team. We always like to hit our stride late (in the season), and I think that is what we're doing this year. So I think it's looking good for us."

On the effect on the team having an eight-day break this late in the season:

"It's nice to have a break. We kept practicing. We always work hard in practice, and (it) gave the coaches time to fix some stuff that we were maybe lacking in (some of our recent) games. A lot of times when we get a big break, we're able to make some adjustments and I think the coaches have done a good job of that."

On if he has thought about availing himself on the extra year of eligibility the NCAA has granted:

"Not really too much. I'm trying to make sure that I take each game this year and play like it's my last. Like I've said before, last year our season got canceled. You never know if that may happen again, even though we hope it won't. But I take every game by itself. Games can get cancelled. It could be your last game, so I really don't want to think about that until the end of the year."

On being ranked in the AP top-25 again:

"I mean it's nice to see your name up there. It's always nice, but we know we just have to keep winning. You know, a couple weeks ago when we had lost twice in a row, we weren't anywhere near (being ranked). We know we got here by winning games. We've just got to keep doing that and take that into the conference tournament. When March comes, you have to win to keep your season alive, so we want to keep winning."

San Diego State Senior Forward Matt Mitchell

On being ranked in the AP top-25:

"I think it's a (by product) of our hard work, hard effort and getting back in rhythm. But to me, I've always said numbers don't really mean anything. It all it all comes down to the end of the year and all the work you put in. All the sweat and tears you put in over the course of the season, I think that's what matters and not a number because anything can happen in a basketball game."

On what makes Fresno State a tough team to play:

"I think Justin Hutson is a really good coach. Being here at San Diego State for the (time) he was and being able to take some of the things he did and implement them there at Fresno State, they play a lot like us on the defensive end. (They) really try not to allow teams to score a lot of points. So, it'll be tough going in there because he knows us, and we know him."

On Jordan Schakel being able to elevate his game when he (Matt) has been out injured:

"I have noticed that. I've noticed that a from a couple of the guys as well, that drive to step up their game and to step up to the moment. Jordan, especially with him winning Mountain West (Player of the Week) now twice, has really evolved over the time he's been here at San Diego State. He's really put in the work and that work is obviously showing off right now. I think Jordan is in his rhythm and it'll be up to me to catch up and get my rhythm (going) as well."

On how he is progressing with his leg injuries:

"Well, the knee is 100 percent. Today will be my first practice without the knee brace, so that's a good thing. I'm happy to finally be out of that and be able to step on the court without a brace and (without) feeling like Robocop. But as far as the ankle, it's something I'm just kind of (working) through right now. It may still be lingering, but it is what it is. Over the course of the season guys get banged up and things happen. So right now, it's no excuses. I've got my foot on the gas pedal."

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