



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

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

San Diego State Baseball
Head Coach Mark Martinez
Preseason Zoom Press Conference
Feb. 15, 2021

Opening Statement:

"I guess before we even kick off with an opening statement, first and foremost just to be sitting here talking about our season, you know, accolades have to go out to our administration, (athletic director) John David Wicker, our entire committee and the president of our University (Dr. Adela de la Torre). Just for our athletes to have an opportunity to practice and now have an opportunity to compete has taken a lot of effort, a lot of time and it's very much appreciated throughout our entire baseball program and athletic department. There are a lot of moving parts to it and it's a lot of work. I think there are times that we've all been frazzled, but at the same time, we can't be more thankful to have the opportunity from the hard work everyone has done in our athletic department, all the way from our administration to our training room, our strength staff, our equipment room and media relations... But it's been it's been a road that I can tell you has been great to experience because talking with other people that we do play in leagues around our area, we're way ahead of the curve. The things that we've done throughout the fall and moving into the spring, even though at times it's been cumbersome, it's been unbelievable that we have the opportunity. We're way ahead of a lot of people. All the things that we went through this fall and early part of the spring just to get here, again, has trained and prepared us to have the opportunity to compete hopefully this coming weekend. So (we're) looking forward to that. We felt like we put together a great baseball team last year, and we did. We were off to a great start, we were 10-6. We had two very grueling road trips to start the year. We took two out of three at a tournament in South Carolina, then we came back from Oklahoma, who was ranked at the time [No. 11]. (We) should've won two out of three, but the ball got a little wet for us at the end. Our guys aren't used to playing in that kind of weather and we gave a game away on a Sunday. But we really had a nice team assembled and the cool part about that is we really only lost two guys off of last year's team, Casey Schmitt and Anthony Walters, both were drafted. We've got some bonus guys back, some super seniors, Ryan Orr, Mike Jarvis and Jacob Cruce, who have just done an unbelievable job of leadership, helping us kind of manage all the quirks to the season. So we've leaned on (those) three super seniors tremendously, and kind of coupled with all of that, we have an experienced pitching staff. With an abbreviated schedule, that definitely bodes well for us. We have a very deep talented pitching staff, and then offensively and on the defensive end, again, we're littered with upperclassmen and experienced guys that have (spent) a lot of time in Division I baseball, so we're looking forward to have an opportunity to test it out this coming Friday."

On whether the local players who were living at home during fall practice will continue to do so into the season:

"It's been throughout the year, and really it's (the) kind of a decision, I would say, the majority of have made on their own. I think once they understood that they didn't want to put themselves or their teammates (in jeopardy). If they did (test) positive, the contact tracing gets very cumbersome and it could knock out three to 10 guys if it's a really bad situation. So a lot of our local guys made that decision to stay at home and stay safe during not only the fall practice season, but obviously the spring season to keep themselves a little bit more isolated from having those contact tracing opportunities if something were to happen."

On the possibility of Friday's pitching matchup featuring SDSU's Troy Melton vs. USD's Carter Rustad:

"That's what it's looking like. Troy Melton will start for us on Friday, and I don't know if USD has officially announced (theirs). I know they've had some issues with their program and COVID, but that's the matchup we're looking forward to on Friday."

"If there were more seats in the stands for scouts, it would be full. I don't know how that's going to play out getting those guys, but it's going to be a very heavily scouted matchup. Their guy, I don't even know if he gave up an earned run last year. I mean, he's really, really good, and then Troy's been a dynamic guy who is still growing. He has a lot of room to grow in his ability and his experience. So you're kind of looking at a little fresher dude with a very experienced guy. Hopefully, we can score one off of him and (if) Troy doesn't give up any, we'll be in good shape."

On if he's determined the starter for game three on Sunday, as well as the back end of the bullpen:

"Right now, Mike Paredes will probably end up (as the starter) on Sunday, the back end of the bullpen will probably be Tre Brown as we enter the weekend. Just trying to maintain and manage (the bullpen) is very, very critical based on the fact that our kids have not had the same level of training, so we're going to be very careful. We could say that Tre is going to be our closer, so to speak, but I don't know if he'll throw twice in a weekend this early in the season. So it could be a (bullpen by) committee as we move through the first couple (or) three weekends before we really kind of settle into a cadence throughout the year. Right now, it would be Tre Brown, but you're going to see a host of other guys kind of finishing games as well."

On how the team's mental maturity has strengthened through the pandemic and into the season:

"I love that question because we talk about it all the time. Our guys have had to grow up really fast, not only if you're a junior or senior but a freshman or sophomore. Understanding, number one, is that the commitment they're making to play Division I athletics in this environment, you do have to grow up exponentially throughout a very short amount of time. So the ask all year has been to make great choices, you know, off the field, on the field, obviously. But managing yourselves off the field is probably the biggest asks. It's a huge ask, so they've had to grow up and make some really hard decisions to kind of stay, I guess, antisocial so to speak, which our guys and most kids are in this age group. That's kind of their deal. On a side note, that is part of their growth and development, that they are kind of, you know, losing throughout this year. But at the same time, they're Division I athletes, so the commitment level is extremely high, yes, they have to grow up really, really fast and I have seen that absolutely. . . Just from the time we started this whole deal and kind of having them fall in line up to this point, it's been a been a big ask and a big commitment. We see it day-to-day; our guys are trained, and they understand where they need to go. In the fall, we had to paint spots in the outfield where they had to stretch. We don't do that anymore, they know exactly where their spot is, so it's kind of fun. But it's been good, and they've had to grow up some. The other part of it is the baseball maturity as well because we're so limited in our training. The ask has been to raise their baseball IQ day to day and we're seeing that as we're getting close to the season, which makes me feel a little bit better."

On if he thinks there might be some lingering rust this weekend after last playing 11 months ago:

"We're not going to have to coach effort or energy, I can promise you that. We're going to be very excited to actually play somebody else in the other dugout, so it wouldn't be rust. I think it would be more experience in game (with) timing, those kinds of things that we're trying to challenge them with every day. But then when you put another uniform in the dugout, sometimes things start to move a little quick. So what we're trying to do is slow those moments down during our intrasquads and when it kind of gets weird. The only other thing that I'm really concerned about obviously is health, endurance, fitness, those kinds of things over a long season. Even though it's an abbreviated deal, our guys have not been battle tested for a long time. So I worry about that every day we go out to practice, guys getting nicks and bumps and we do have some of that going on right now. We had several guys in the last week that have tweaked a hamstring, arms are a little bit sore and it's because we've kind of ramped up the pressure on them a little bit to kind of compete at a higher level. But I do worry about that all the time, so my job as the head coach of this program is to manage each one of our players very carefully and making sure that we're not putting too much on them too early in order to finish the season healthy."

On if there's a different approach to the season since the schedule is dominated by conference games:

"The difference in approach is honestly the amount of opportunities that we have to repair problems week to week. We don't have a Tuesday or Wednesday game to play if you're reeling a little bit from a weekend series when you'd (typically) have an opportunity to repair some of those mistakes to get ready for the next weekend. I have to tell you that making the decision to play two days a weekend was definitely (something) we did not want to do in conference. All of our coaches wanted to go three days, but I can tell you (it was) a great decision by our conference to do that, to put us in a position to minimize the opportunities for bad things to happen as far as COVID goes. So when you shorten those days, you have more

of an opportunity to finish your season. So a very good decision by the Mountain West Conference to (schedule) a doubleheader on a Saturday and a single (game) on Sunday to kind of minimize those opportunities and keep our kids safe."

On the possibility of facing interruptions to the season like some other sports:

"We've already talked about it. It kind of (stinks), so to speak, because it's probably going to happen, and so what I keep telling (our players) is that we have to prepare for that mentally and then when it does happen we're going to have to prepare for it in real time. We'll see how that kind of plays out as we move forward. Obviously, how practice looks, if we do miss a weekend or whatever it might be. We're going to have to be really smart with what we're doing. I don't want them to get practice fatigue, either. So we're going to be really careful with that as far as how much time we're going to spend on the practice field. I want them to be fresh for the opportunities they have on the weekend and so that's our job as coaches, to make sure we're managing that in a great way, just so they stay fresh for the weekends when it does happen."

On the positives and negatives of being picked first in the Mountain West preseason poll:

"Really that's based on past history, nobody really saw us play last year. I think you kind of look at (the fact that) we've won some conference tournament championships and played in postseason recently. It's nice to be thought of that way, but I think it was kind of the choice you did have to make just based on past history, not really anything off of last year. We're very honored, it's a neat deal. But I can tell you that our guys understand that they're mules and they still have to earn a lot of stuff that they need to do on the baseball field. I'm not worried about it. We're honored, it's great, but we haven't won anything yet. We have a long season ahead; there's so many variables that happen in baseball, whether it's injuries, a (pitcher) goes down or whatever it might be. Right now, our focus is on winning the regular season championship in the Mountain West and in securing that automatic bid into the postseason."

On pitcher Troy Melton starting to draw attention:

"Well, he was getting a ton of attention last year. I think he's been through that kind of romantic phase of getting the attention from the scouts, advisors, agents, those type of people, so he's been through that already. Now I just see him dealing with it in a little more mature way, not really worrying too much about having a bunch of (radar) guns pointed his way or whatever. But think he's matured in dealing with it. It's really very similar — and I'm not saying he's this guy — but it's very similar to what Stephen Strasburg had to go through during his sophomore (and) junior years, just a ton of attention. A lot of eyes on him, a lot of preseason accolades, those kinds of things. But he already kind of went through that, so we talked about that. I just think he's grown up to it, and it doesn't really weird him out at all, so I think he's prepared to go out and just be himself and compete."

-SDSU-