



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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### San Diego State-Utah State Postgame Quotes

San Diego State 68, Nevada 57

Thomas & Mack Center | Las Vegas, Nev.

March 13, 2021

### San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

#### Opening Statement:

"First of all, I could not be prouder of a group of players coming together in a year of adversity [and] dealing with COVID-19 restraints, [I could not be prouder] of our university for supporting us and getting us on the floor, giving us a chance to play in big games like this. To win a postseason conference tournament against a team that was our last loss [as we] we have not had a loss since January 16, and we lost two in a row to Utah State, and to think that two months later, we would meet them again in the championship game for the third straight year and be able to escape with a victory. I could not be prouder of this program, the coaches and the players that represented.

#### On how the ice bath after winning felt:

"Thank goodness it was ice water and not Gatorade, because I told them (the team) I have to wear some of the shirts in Indy next week since I am not going home. So, at least it was ice water, and I can salvage the shirts."

#### On his thoughts on his uniquely deep team:

"I know it (having bench depth) helped us in the Mountain West Tournament [when we had to] play three straight days. Our depth was definitely something that was important and paid off for us at the end. We had fresh lights down the stretch because we could rest players and [because] everybody that plays for us contributes, and a different player [steps up] every night. It was just yesterday I was fielding questions about Nate Mensah being ineffective and (fielding questions about) what was wrong, and he stepped up tonight and played like an all-conference player [as well as] Josh(ua) Tomaic off the bench, backing up Nate, played big minutes to install. That is the beauty of this team, any given night anyone can step up, and that's what makes us dangerous.

#### On how his bigs played against Neemis Queta:

"I take playing Qaeda even (from my guys), he is a fantastic player, so if we played him even that is good enough for me. But they (Nathan Mensah and Joshua Tomaic) did a good job. He is a hard guy to guard and we had two bodies on him and used AG (Aguiek Arop) as the third body to run at him. We tried to keep fresh lights on him and he is (Queta) a fantastic player but it is very gratifying to see those guys answer the call today and play so well against such a good player."

#### On his trust fall off the ladder after cutting down nets and if the team talked him into doing it:

"I talked them into it (him doing the trust fall) and it is called a trust fall [because] you have to trust your team. I do not know if I had fallen backwards (off the ladder into a trust) if we lost the game, they might [have] let me hit the floor, but since we won I thought it was a good opportunity to see if I could trust them or not and [after that] I think I can."

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**On the physical toughness of his team and their game plan for beating Utah State:**

"We wanted to be the first team that out-rebounded them (Utah State) this year and we were not—but we fought for every one of them, and that was key to the game, to have that kind of grit and toughness to try to get every rebound we could. A lot of the fouls we had down the stretch were box outs and we were hitting them hard as they came to the glass and we were probably fouling them [in the process] but we said we will take that kind of foul if we are hitting them and not letting them have second-chance opportunities. We thought rebounding and effort plays were going to be the key to the game, we knew [the game] was going to be hard-fought and low scoring [because] both teams are really good defensively. We found enough time to make enough timely plays to come out with a win."

**On the shifts in his game plan from their regular-season matchups with Utah State and if he felt better about today's matchups:**

"I felt better [for today's game] being a full strength, obviously Nathan (Mensah) struggled at altitude and Matt (Mitchell) did not play. To have those pieces (Nathan and Matt playing) is important especially with three games in three days. We needed every body we had and I thought both teams gutted it out through tired legs at times. Each team was waiting for the other one to take a get time out, and I just did not take one because I thought we had fresher legs and deeper bench. We wanted to keep the play going as long as we could."

**On if his team wanted to play Utah State in the championship game of the MW Tournament:**

"I think if they (his student-athletes) had a choice, this (Utah State) would be the team they wanted to play because they have some pride about them and they knew that Utah State had beaten us twice this season and they knew they were a good team and they beaten us two times in a row in the conference championship (2019 and 2020). So, I don't know if the coaches were the as excited about playing them but the team was and they are the ones that have to play so it worked out well."

**On the unique experience of Vegas and the conference tournament this year:**

"It's been unique all year. We don't eat together—we take meals to our room, and we stay in our own rooms. The players have their own rooms now because of COVID protocols. [Because of that] it is so fun to see them when they are together finally on the floor and celebrating together, those moments because we don't get enough of them this year. But, that is what we have to do in order to play these games and so I am really proud of them."

**On if the bubble experience in Vegas will help them moving into the NCAA tournament bubble:**

"We are used to it at this point, you know, it will be even more rigid (regulations inside the bubble) I think once we get to Indianapolis from what I am understanding. But I said from the start (of the season), you have to be flexible, both with your schedule, you may get games canceled with having teams have to defer game. (The Vegas bubble) was just the next step in being flexible and just rolling with the way it goes so we get onto the basketball floor. We take great joy every time we can step on the floor."

**On Pulliam's play today in cutting down Utah State's runs at the lead:**

"It seemed seemed like he made the answering basket every time they made a run. They (Utah State) had cut it to six (point-lead for the Aztecs) and he had a steal, then they cut it to six again, he had the runner. He created the separation for us with those plays, and I do not know the exact circumstances, but I know every play he made was timely and important to us in winning today."

**On Nathan Mensah's temperament:**

"He is just a soft-spoken kid. He competes hard and he practices hard every day. But he is not real verbal, he just goes about his business in a workman-like fashion and that is how he was today on the floor. He is workmanlike and he was motivated (today) because he knew he was playing against Queta, a first team all-conference center. I think he was inspired by that (matchup) and he came out and played one of his better games obviously."

**On winning both the regular season and conference tournament championship and what it means to him:**

"It is just validation that we have a program, and we are not a one hit wonder as Coach Fisher used to say. We have a program to be proud of. We are 53-6 the last two years and I do not know many programs that have that kind of record."

## **San Diego State Senior Forward Matt Mitchell**

### **On Nathan Mensah's play today and the level the team can play at when he is at his best:**

"Nathan is a force on both ends, rolling to the rim and in the post, and on the defensive end [he is] disrupting other bigs and disrupting guards coming downhill while blocking shots. When he is playing at a high level, I think it only ups our level of play. As Coach (Brian) Dutcher says, it does not just take one player for this team. We have a lot of guys on this team that can go and Nathan's one of those guys that they can really dominate and can really change the game for us."

### **On his current emotions after winning the conference tournament MVP and championship:**

"My emotions are high. I am very happy to be able to say that we won the conference, won the conference tournament, and we are moving on now to take our shot at winning a national championship. This is everything that we spoken to life of at the beginning of the season and we followed through with it. We are only moving forward from here. We are happy but we can not be content."

"It means a lot (to win today). (Today's game) was also redemption in trying to finish what we what we started last year. (Today's win is) for the guys that were here last year as well as for the grad transfers that came in [because] Terrell (Gomez) and Josh (Tomaic) came here to win. It is also winning for them because they came here for a championship. I would say we got the job done."

### **On the satisfaction of the entire team producing:**

"It is very satisfying. As Dutch always says and as the seniors always say, it is 1 through 15. We have belief and faith in all of our guys to get the job done, whether it is their night or it is not their night. I want these guys to take those shots and be aggressive and play their game."

### **On how the moment feels after losing a chance at competing in the tournament last year due to COVID-19:**

"(This moment) it feels amazing. It just truly feels great to be able to say that we overcame all the adversity that was in front of us, and [that we] overcame every obstacle and mountain that was in front of us. We kept our head down, kept pushing and really stayed together and did not fater towards the end of the season."

## **San Diego State Senior Guard Jordan Schakel**

### **On what it means to him to help Joshua Tomaic and Terrell Gomez win a championship:**

"It means a lot (to help them win a championship). There are times during the season when you are tired and you are looking for things to motivate because selfish motivation sometimes wears out and it is guys like TGo (Terrel Gomez) and Josh(ua Tomaic) that come here and just want to win that keep you going. They keep you going at the level that you need to win games like this, and I am really happy for those guys that we were able to get them wins. They played so well in these games and worked so hard. It did not have to be scoring, defense, rebounding, they kept us stay together in the huddle and really helped us."

### **On the toughness of the team and how he stayed engaged when Utah State was constantly targeting him on their defensive attack:**

"It is not hard (to stay focused) when all you want to do is win. Individual stats do not matter if you do not get the win, and it just feels good to win. I was talking to somebody after the game, and we were talking about cutting down the nets and the trophies and all that, but what you really remember is the guys you went through it with, the guys that were there since August and dealing with everything we dealt with this year. It is memories you have for a lifetime when you win two championships like this. (Those memories) are something that nobody can take away. They can steal the trophy, they can rip down at banner, they can get on a ladder, but they can ever take away the memories and the bonds that you made with your teammates and your coaches and the trainers and you know everybody that goes with us."