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

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San Diego State Weekly Press Conference Quotes March 8, 2021

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"I would just like to say how excited I am and happy for a group of players that went through all the protocols mandated for them, found a way to continue to get better as a team, to play selfless basketball, and win back-to-back Mountain West regular-season titles. That is a credit, not only to them, but to an outstanding group of coaches I have working for me that have worked tireless hours to make sure this team is prepared to play basketball. I could not be more proud of a group (of student-athletes, coaches) and the accomplishments they have made over the last two seasons. To be sitting here with a 50-6 record over the past two years is really impressive and a credit to everybody (involved)."

On the challenges of playing three games in three days as the team could at the Mountain West tournament:

"Obviously, tired legs, and lack of preparation. You have to (as a team and coach) rely a lot more on your fundamentals. For game one, we will have two teams we are looking at and trying to do a little bit of something for each of them. After that, the turnarounds (between games) are so quick, so we usually have a quick meeting in a (hotel) ballroom, we walk through a few things, and then we go play. The thing I like about this team is we have great depth. We will play ten deep if AG (Aguiek Arop) is capable and that depth should help us in the situation where we are playing multiple games in multiple days."

On his balance of giving the team rest and keeping its rhythm before postseason play:

"Sometimes there are concerns about game timing if you take days off. But we were a little banged up at the end of the (the regular season), just normal aches and pains. We got back at 2:30 a.m., after beating UNLV and gave them the next day off [and] the following day off. We got together on Saturday and we did some hard shooting and did film work from the UNLV game to try and keep their shooting rhythm together, gave them Sunday off, and now Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday will be hard game action against each other, getting our timing ready for whatever opponent we face Thursday afternoon at noon."

On Trey Pulliam's recent growth and what he has meant to the team this year:

"The biggest thing that has changed in Trey game is confidence in his own offense. As a point guard, you always walk the line of getting your teammates involved or playing for your own shots. Sometimes the best play is for yourself and I think he started getting comfortable doing that, seeing that if he has an angle or if he has an open shot not to be afraid to take it, and that there will be plenty of time to get assists like he did against UNLV, where he had eight. He is doing a better job of picking and choosing when to and then when to just get his teammates involved."

On the possibilities for Trey's growth if he returned for an additional season at San Diego State and any other players using their additional years of eligibility:

"You have seen his growth now, from year one to year two just playing division one basketball as opposed to junior college. Trey continues to get

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better every time he steps on the floor. So, as far as any of these guys returning, I have not had talks with any of them. I want them focused on this year solely. We will have plenty of time when the year ends to discuss if any of them are interested in returning for another year with the Aztecs."

On the current coaching situation at Minnesota, his named being connected to the possible search for a new head coach, and how he addresses it with the fans, team:

"I would say Richard Pitino is the head coach of the University of Minnesota and they are preparing to play in the Big 10 tournament. And I am here in San Diego State trying to be solely focused on getting the Aztecs ready to play in the Mountain West tournament and then the NCAA tournament. Any comment beyond that would probably not be timely or worth discussion at this time."

On how a coach decides if they should change jobs, leave a program:

"Like I have told every coach that ever worked here with me or for me, 'you have to choose your own path, and I don't know what that is.' I have had assistant coaches that have moved on other places and I said (to them), 'You have to be comfortable with your path. No two paths are the same.' I have been extremely happy with the path I have had, to have been here, on The Mesa, for 20+ years and to be the head coach at San Diego State University. My path has been nothing but positive and full of joy, and I just embrace every day here and I do not try to look beyond that."

On the results of the media's poll for MW all-conference team and players of the year and Matt Mitchell not being named Player of the Year:

"It just all depends, I mean, there is (voting by a player's) numbers and then there's the belief that if you are the best player on the conference championship team that you should be the MVP. I think every time I voted or am given the opportunity, I usually vote for the best player on the championship team because championships mean something. We will see what the coaches poll shows us tomorrow. But I think Matt is the MVP of the conference."

On early COVID-19 testing times at the Mountain West tournament:

"I have said from the beginning (that) we have to remain flexible. And that was with our scheduling, with our practices, with protocols and this is just another example of being flexible. This is not ideal, we know that, but to play basketball games, it is worth doing. We get up early, we lift weights 7 a.m., so this is not out of the ordinary for us to be up early and getting our work in. We will gladly get up, get tested, and we look forward to playing our first game Thursday."

On cutting down nets after returning from Las Vegas at 2 a.m.:

"We wanted to give them that experience. I am not a big proponent of doing it on someone else's home floor, that did not make sense to me, but we wanted to give them the 'cutting down net' experience. So, we got back to the JAM Center at 2:30 a.m., we had back-to-back championship t-shirts already printed and made for them sitting on chairs and we cut the net down. I thought it was a really great moment and what better way to do it in a COVID-era than just our small group of people enjoying that moment together. That is kind of how the whole year has been. So we enjoyed it, and hopefully we will get that opportunity to do it again soon."

"There were no injuries, we had Sergio (Ibarra, the team's trainer) there in case anybody got overly aggressive with those scissors. But we managed to do it correctly."

San Diego State Senior Guard Trey Pulliam

On how he is different from the player who arrived at San Diego State two years ago:

"I think I am a completely different player, as far as playing on both sides of the ball. Defensively, I've made bigger jumps in my game. Offensively, I've just gotten more comfortable, used my experience to know the right reads and I'm playing with confidence."

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On what specifically has changed in his game in the last month:

"I've been in the gym getting reps and working on game shots, so seeing it go in in practice and seeing it go in a few times in the games has helped my confidence and made me more comfortable on the court. That's really it."

On why he chose San Diego State last year, when there were already two guards (Malachi Flynn and KJ Feagin) who would more than likely be starting ahead of him:

"I didn't know that KJ was going to start. Coach Dave (Velasquez) recruited me and told me there were 25 minutes on the table. I came in looking to earn as many minutes as I could. I knew I was coming to a winning program, was going to put the work in and see how it goes, and let God work."

On what he is focusing on specifically for the upcoming Mountain West Tournament and what the keys are for the team:

"Just winning... that's it. Winning the tournament and then make a big run in, if not win, the NCAA Tournament. That's what we are about right now, winning. The keys are the same as always; playing good defense and really just doing what we are capable of."

On if it is a challenge to play three games in three days:

"(It's) very challenging, especially at this level. After every game your body's beat up. It's challenging playing the way we (have this year), with a day in between (games). You have to take the time to recover, get some sleep, get treatment and come in everyday with a positive mindset and do the work."

San Diego State Senior Guard Jordan Schakel

On if, since the team has played in the championship game in the last three years, it is tough to maintain a one-game at a time mindset:

"Not really. That's what we do... one game at a time. You have to take it one game at a time to get to the championship. Just because we have been there the last three years does not mean anything. It's a new year and we are looking for a new outcome. We're not focused on the past, where looking forward."

On why he is good at taking and making shots when the game is on the line:

"That is a good question. I think I just like "the moment." I like the pressure, and have all my life. That is when basketball is its most fun and I look forward to the end of the game situations."

On the level of play that Trey Pulliam has been at in the last month:

"Extremely high. Being a floor general and leader, I think teams try to sag off him and force him into shooting jump shots. (He has) consistently been taking and making the shots he wants and getting into the paint for floaters, dishing (the ball), and playing tough defense. He's just been playing at an extremely high level for us."

On outside the Xs and Os, how is it to play for Coach Dutcher:

"He does a great job knowing people, knowing personnel. He knows how to talk to different people. He knows how to instill confidence; he doesn't take it away. It's very easy to play for a guy like that and his record (50-6 in the last two seasons) speaks for itself."

San Diego State Senior Forward Matt Mitchell

On what is the toughest part of playing three games in three days, if SDSU makes it to the MW championship game:

"Over the years I've found it's tough to stay healthy and fight through the fatigue, but March is what you live for as a player. Here at San Diego State, we pride ourselves at getting better as the year goes on and right now, we are reaching our optimal point. And now that we are near the end of the year, I don't think we will run out of gas."

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On what has been the hardest part of being a player during the pandemic:

"The mental toll. Not being able to go anywhere or to step outside of your hotel unless you are on your way to shootaround or coming back from shootaround or getting a snack. There is very little you are able to do. So mentally not being able to be free and do what you please to get your mind off (basketball) is rough mentally."

On being able to bookend his career with Mountain West tournament titles:

"I think it would be very satisfying. I think that that is all I could ask for. Jordan (Schakel) and I and all the seniors we have with us, Trey (Pulliam), Terrell (Gomez) and Joshua (Tomaic), that would be a great way to end it. But we've got to take it one game at a time. Right now, we are taking it one day at a time, moving into practice for the tournament. The way we will get there is to take it one game at a time. We are not looking past anybody."

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