



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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**San Diego State Baseball**  
**Head Coach Mark Martinez**  
**Zoom Press Conference**  
**April 27, 2021**

### **Opening Statement:**

"First and foremost, I would like to congratulate (SDSU softball head coach) Kathy Van Wyk on 800 (career) victories. That's a great milestone. Obviously, she's done great things for San Diego State, so congratulations, Coach. Really excited about that milestone and hope she can make it to 1,600. As for baseball, we're kind of heading down the back stretch of our season. We had a nice weekend against Dixie State even though we made it very interesting. We had to walk off a couple games on Saturday. That's a good baseball team; they're going to make some noise in the WAC moving forward. They definitely surprised us a little bit. Heading into Nevada, it's a big series for us. They beat us two out of three here, so this is a huge weekend for San Diego State baseball. The idea is to continue to hold on to first place in the (Mountain West) conference moving forward and hopefully get that automatic bid (to the NCAA Tournament) at the end of the season by winning the regular-season championship. But that's kind of where we're at. We have a shorter week of practice. We're going to practice today and tomorrow before leaving on Thursday for Nevada. We play an unusual Friday-Saturday series based on some travel issues we had, so a little shorter week. Hopefully it works well for us and we kind of keep rolling offensively and our pitching continues to improve, but we're looking forward to a good weekend up in Reno."

### **On if he's surprised by how dynamic the offense has been so far this season:**

"Offensively, we have an experienced group and so that bodes well (for us) having to face some pitching that has been kind of across the board, especially on the back end of weekends. There's a lot of big numbers being put up across the country. It's starting to settle down a little bit, but I think it means that the pitchers are starting to get a little more comfortable with what they're doing. Just like in our program, you know, I think our guys had an 11-month break from not seeing live hitting. You need to have that data and when you're not doing it, it's a difficult task. Our guys haven't been repeating pitches in intended spots where they need to be, whether it's a fastball in or a breaking ball away. So we're still kind of playing a little bit of catch-up with that. But again, it doesn't mean our pitching staff isn't good. We have really good arms throughout our (roster); our top eight or nine guys are really, really good. It's just more of them kind of growing up and continue to improve throughout the season. Offensively, we just have a really experienced group, guys who have bought into a system of swinging the bat, have vicious at-bats when you get deeper into the count, and our guys have done a great job, especially with our two-strike approach, not giving in, not giving away any at-bats. I thought this (past) weekend, I will tell you, is that our guys did not look like our offensive guys. We had Matt Rudick out of the lineup on Saturday for both games and then on Sunday, Caden Miller did not play. They were banged up a little bit, so it was a great opportunity to give some guys (a chance) to play. But it definitely impacted our lineup, so we're looking forward to having both those guys back this weekend and hopefully continue with the offensive (display) we've been putting together throughout the season."

### **On starting three different left fielders last weekend vs. Dixie State:**

"Ryan Orr's been our left fielder and he's has been struggling a bit, so that's going to open up the door for some guys to get an opportunity. Xavier Carter's been busting his tail all year and working (for an) opportunity and sure enough, he stands in there and hits a home run (in his first at-bat of the year). Obviously (he) earns himself more opportunities moving forward, and really it's been based on the fact that our left field hasn't been producing offensively. That's what we did the previous week at Fresno State. We caught Poncho Ruiz and we put Wyatt Hendrie in left field. He

definitely has played outfield before, so it wasn't a flyer. He's done it before, and it allowed us to plug in a really good bat with Poncho, who is a good catcher, and keep Brian Leonhardt in the DH spot and kind of keep rolling that way. So moving forward, that's going to be a spot where somebody can step up and win that job and secure it. I also think that things could change at third. We still haven't got a secure job at third base. Defensively, our guys have broken down; it's probably the weakest spot, and I'm the infield coach, so I can say that. We need to improve in that area and have someone solidify that spot. Whether it's Cole Carrigg or Fisher Pyatt, one of them has to step up defensively in order to continue to (merit) that type of playing time."

#### **On Wyatt Hendrie's injury in game one vs. Dixie State:**

"He's fine. He played the next day. He got hit in the Adam's Apple and was really having a difficult time breathing. He was actually going to play left field in the second game on Saturday, and we made the decision hold him out and see how he felt on Sunday morning in order to have him play (then). Obviously, he came out and did okay, and he was announced as the Mountain West Player of the Week, so I think he's doing just fine."

#### **On whether the team is experimenting using Brian Leonhardt as an opener before Michael Paredes:**

"We're going to keep doing it. Again, we've talked a little bit about our pitching staff. The critical innings are kind of where we're breaking down, the sixth, seventh and eighth innings. What we thought we could do was get an experienced guy like Brian; he can open and get us through two innings. Then we were hopeful that Michael Paredes could pitch those critical innings and that's kind of what we've been getting, about a five-inning stint from him. So when you start doing the math, that gets us into the eighth inning and then we can finish with Tre (Brown). We're even thinking about doing that with Troy (Melton). We won't do it this week, but you kind of want your two best guys during the most critical innings at this point because our bullpen hasn't stepped up in order to win those innings. In a lot of our games that we've have struggled, they've been in that 6-7-8, inning range. Even though our starting numbers aren't gaudy by any means, those are those two guys that have been kind of been the backbone of our pitching staff. So right now we're going to keep it the same; Melton will open up the first game and we'll open with Brian Leonhardt and have Paredes come in after that and kind of see how that plays out. Of course with Ricky (Tibbett), we know what we're going to get from him. He's going to (pitch) five, six competitive innings and he hasn't given up a bunch of big-run innings. We kind of know what we're getting there, so we're going to continue with that."

#### **On why the team hasn't expanded the opener role into other games of a series:**

"Again, we're still in experimental mode, that's why. (Michael Paredes) is a guy who's been around our program for a long time, and we presented (the idea) to him first and then the next thing is to present it to Melton. If we don't get better out of the bullpen, then you're probably going to see that as we move through the season because I want our best guys pitching those most critical innings and they're doing a nice job getting us to the fifth or sixth. But really once we hand the ball off, our bullpen has to get better, and they know that message is given to them every single day in practice. We've challenged them to get better. We've challenged them to pound the strike zone and not give up big innings by giving up free bases and that's kind of what's been happening out of the bullpen. We can shore that up; we got good enough arms to do it. But right now, that hasn't been happening, so that's kind of why we made that choice with the middle game (of the series), and then moving forward, it might be the first two games."

#### **On utilizing Brian Leonhardt in an opener role:**

"You look at Brian Leonhardt; he's an experienced guy; he doesn't get too rattled on stuff. He's kind of that calm-the-water type of guy. That's why we use him out of the bullpen. You can bring him in to kind of snuff out a fire, stop the bongo drums from banging in the other dugout. But we want to maybe start with that, that calming influence to get a game off to a good start. He did a great job this weekend. We made a mistake and didn't get it an out on a competitive double-play ball. We threw the ball (away), so we couldn't get a force out. If we get that force out, he doesn't give up any (runs) and we look like geniuses. Our guys still have to make plays behind (him) when we're making a decision like that. Our guys have to make plays and we didn't in that case, and he gave up two runs. The bottom line is, if we get that out, he comes out of that second inning with no runs and we hand the ball off to Mike (Paredes), and we're looking great. We're looking really smart."

#### **On the team's hitting philosophy:**

"(W)e do hit a lot; it's part of the design. I'm a firm believer in that the only way you can learn what type of hitter you are is to swing the bat. Whether it's in practice or in a game, our offensive philosophy is swing the bat. We're not a big take (team) and that kind of stuff. I want our guys to learn how to hit, (learn) who they are, and what they can and cannot handle. The only way you can learn that is by swinging the bat. Hopefully,

once you start to mature, like a Matt Rudick, you understand what you can and cannot handle and then those pitches become takes. They might be strikes, but they're not swinging at those pitches that they know they can't be successful on and they learn that by swinging the bat. We don't have enough data in college baseball; we don't play every single day; we don't play 160 games or 140 games of minor league baseball. That's where you learn what you can and cannot handle and so we try to kind of turbocharge that. It's all swing, baby. Swing the bat, figure it out. Sometimes that's a curse. We're going to have short innings sometimes. (SDSU pitching coach) Sam (Peraza) hates me for that, but we're going to swing it and find out who we are and be aggressive with our approach and hopefully that (translates into concepts of) 'I know what I can and cannot handle, maybe I won't exit the zone or exit what I'm looking for in that particular at-bat.' We're starting to see that with more and more guys throughout the lineup. Obviously, two guys who have really done a great job with that are Matt Rudick and Jaden Fein, but now you're starting to see Wyatt Hendrie manage his at bats (much) better than he did the beginning of the season, also Caden Miller. Those types of guys are really having a successful season. Brian Leonhardt's another older guy, so he kind of understands that as well. But that's our philosophy, swing the bat."

#### **On the play of the Aztec freshmen and their future prospects with the team:**

"They're good players first and foremost. We wouldn't recruit them if they didn't belong. I think the biggest battle for younger people is just that piece, it's understanding that they do belong. You arrive on campus sometimes and you're around some older guys that understand Division I college baseball and it's a shock to your system. My whole message to them all year long is, 'Hey you belong here, let it play. Don't get in your own head and just play. You're good enough who you are right now.' Obviously, you've got to continue on process and improve. But you know, the two guys that have really done a nice job have been Fisher Pyatt and Cole Carrigg. Those guys have been doing a great job for us, (along with) Poncho Ruiz. He's a dynamic player, he's a dynamic hitter. He's benefiting by being around a guy like Wyatt Hendrie and having a mentorship with an advanced catcher, a guy who's going to be a (high draft pick) this summer. So the future's bright for that kid as well. Again, they're starting to perform at a higher level than they were in February, and so I'm really, really encouraged (with) how they're advancing their game as we start to close out the season."

#### **On the challenges of playing mostly on the road for the rest of the season:**

"Well, we talked about it all year long, even though we haven't experienced it very much (this year), is that we pride ourselves on being a great road team. I think we've done a great job during my tenure here going on the road and finding ways to win series. So we embrace the opportunity. It's really not a challenge for us, it's more of an opportunity. It's much better to go to Air Force in May than it is in March, so we'll see how that plays out. But I'm excited for it. I'm looking forward to getting on the road and pulling together, circling the wagons and go out and try and win the conference on the road. It's going to be a lot of fun for us. A great, great opportunity for us."

#### **On if he has a sense of which team in the MW might provide the biggest challenge for the Aztecs down the stretch:**

"No. I mean, if you're not playing, you don't know who's going to challenge, right? So you don't have a good feel for it . . . We just have to treat each weekend as an opportunity and not worry about who we're playing and try and go win games. Not worry about who's in front of us or who's in back of us . . . Our whole deal from here on out is we're basically playing a regional every single weekend. That's what we're playing for. Our postseason definitely started two weeks ago, and so we're in postseason mode right now. We're trying to get to the end of it, so we have an opportunity to play in postseason, but our postseason's right now."

#### **On if not conducting the MW Tournament this year has energized the team:**

"I sure hope so. I hope they're listening to me because, like I just told you, every weekend's a regional and that's what we're trying to treat it as. This is our opportunity, so it's playoff baseball really from here on out. We can't have any slip-ups and so that's kind of where we are in the program. In order to be rewarded at the end of the season, we have to continue to win series or outright sweep series to have that opportunity. It's a lot of pressure to put on kids but hey, it's a lot of fun, man. We get to play at regionals this weekend in Reno, let's go."

#### **On what it would take to get more MW teams in the NCAA Tournament:**

"I think we got to a place with Boise (State) in the (league) where the schedule got set up so we could schedule better. Across the board, credit to all of our programs before Boise dropped their program (with) aggressive schedules throughout. I think the one commitment that we have is that we're trying to play some really tough series on the front end of our conference. As you saw even in 2020, we went out to Coastal Carolina to play in a tournament, we went to Oklahoma to play out there. Coming up, we're going to play in the MLB 4 tournament to start off next year. We have our

Tony Gwynn (Legacy) tournament. We're going to Cal. Our midweek games are as good as anybody in the country. But across the board, all of our teams are making a commitment to play better competition outside of conference in order to raise the RPI. Everybody in the conference is doing that. We're going to continue to put that at the forefront and make sure that everybody's aggressively scheduling, so we can raise the RPI and at the back end, get multiple teams into the tournament."

**On what has been the biggest challenge to maintaining the health and safety of the team amidst the pandemic:**

"(R)eally the protocols and everything we have were put in place by our university and by our athletic department in the fall. They were very stringent and very hard to manage, so right now managing it is routine. It's not like a challenge anymore. Our guys understand the protocols that are in place, whether we're at home, on the road. They understand that when we're on the road, we don't leave our room. We stay in the hotel; we play baseball and we come home. We don't go out for team meals; we don't do any of that stuff. We make sure we're socially distanced and we're masked up pretty much the entire time. But all that stuff was put in place this fall. Again, as cumbersome and challenging as it was, it put us in a position now, knock on wood, that we should be able to play a full season and probably be the only school in the conference playing an entire season. So that's a credit to our administration and our university, putting us in a position to do that. And I'm very thankful for that. Right now, it's not a challenge, it's more just reminders of making sure that we stay on task. When we're at home, guys aren't going outside (messing) around and doing stuff, and they've committed to that. The whole message (from) our entire athletic department is that when you're making a commitment to play sports here at San Diego State, you're making a commitment to these protocols in order to play games and compete when your season comes around, and I think our school's done a phenomenal job of doing that."

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