



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State Baseball
Head Coach Mark Martinez
Zoom Press Conference
April 6, 2021

Opening Statement:

"Coming off a really big weekend for the Aztecs. We found a way to win on Friday. It looked pretty dim in the first game on Friday. But we found a way to come back and win that deal (with) seven straight [batters reaching], something like that. It was pretty much a blur; a lot a lot of excitement obviously in our dugout, and then to kind of do another walk off on the second game was huge. I think that carried over into Saturday. I think we kept the confidence up, scored a lot of runs and kind of took advantage of a team being down. So it was a really good weekend for the Aztecs. We have a lot of meat on the bone, so to speak, moving forward into the season. Based on the fact that some of the teams in the conference aren't playing a full schedule, kind of puts the onus on us to win them all. That's kind of the message to our team. We're going to have to get a mindset to basically try and win every game. It's no different than any other time, but this year every single game is very, very important for our baseball program moving forward. We have a really difficult opponent (Nevada) coming in this weekend and the back end of our schedule is mostly on the road. We've really only experienced one in-conference road trip (to San José State) and did a nice job winning two out of three. But moving forward, I think every game is kind of like Friday Night Lights, and we have to get after it and put ourselves in a position to hopefully play in the postseason."

On whether the team's first real travel experience of the season contributed to last weekend's comeback wins:

"Absolutely. We made a choice to bus to San Jose, which we haven't done in the past. That is not really a short bus trip; my back will tell you that's a very long bus trip. But it was good to kind of go face some adversity, a long bus trip going up there, following protocols with COVID as far as meals and hotel. It was unusual for guys; we hadn't experienced that yet, and I thought our guys responded well winning two out of three on the road. I think there was a little bit of a "hangover"; our schedule got disrupted again. Instead of playing Saturday and Sunday, all of a sudden we have one less day of practice to prepare for New Mexico on Friday. So I think there was a little bit of that going into the game on Friday, but I will tell you the response was unbelievable. Our kids never really felt like they were out of the game. I think we made some mistakes early in the game on the mound. Obviously, we made some defensive mistakes that we didn't recover very well from, but having an experienced team, and to have Mike Jarvis step up and hit a triple (in the ninth) kind of gave us that glimmer of hope. Our kids care, man, they care a lot, and that's shown through. Being kind of dead in the water and finding a way to come back to win that (game) and getting a big contribution from a kid (pinch-hitter TJ Fontain) that had four-at bats the whole year and have an opportunity to get in there and win the game for us was a big shot in the arm for our whole team, not just TJ. We had a great pitching performance from (Troy) Melton (in the second game) and true to form, we found a way to let New Mexico back in the game with some mistakes, but I think we responded exceptionally well. In the extra inning, the California tiebreaker, we did a great job managing their runner at second base. They tried to bunt him up; they got him over, and then we got two big plays to get out of that inning. Then (we had) just some real big at-bats from guys off the bench once again. Ryan Orr was at second base; Max Foxcroft comes in and doesn't panic, he draws a walk. I can't tell you how what a huge at-bat that is to have a kid come off the bench, not try to create something and not give in. He drew a walk and then we added what we call two nickels, a dime bunt from Caden Miller and then, of course, Mike Jarvis delivered the base hit (to win it). So I'm proud of our guys. Again, we have a long ways to go; we have a lot of stuff to do and continue to kind of improve our résumé hopefully moving forward into the postseason."

On what to expect from Nevada this weekend:

"What we're going to get is an aggressive style of play. The numbers don't show (it), but they're extremely talented on the mound. Their front three guys are really, really good. They have pro-type stuff; we're going to be tasked with some really tough at-bats and some challenges each at-bat. The flip side is that our offense is leading the country in hitting and hopefully that kind of stays firm there. But they're going to be aggressive; they're going to get after us, and again they're their frontline pitching is really, really good. We have to prepare properly moving into this weekend over the next four days of practice."

On the team's ability to maintain its level-headedness:

Again, I talked about this early on. I think the experience that we have throughout our lineup, not just the hitters but on the (pitcher's mound) and the leadership that we have, lends itself to do that. Our guys play every inning like its own little competition and we're finding ways to just win each inning and not get too panicked about what the score might say. I think our guys have kind of shown throughout the season that if (they) get down one or two (runs), I think they've responded really well, and really that's (a result of) the experience that we have. We have a lot of guys who have been down this road before and know that we're pretty good. Just trust the talent, trust the work that they put in and that's the message they (bring) in the dugout, so it's kind of nice to sit back and watch and not get in the way. It's a lot of fun."

On whether Ricky Tibbett will hold on to the Sunday starter spot:

"Absolutely. Looking back as you know, Ricky started in the bullpen and he hadn't really trained as a starter. We took the week leading into the San José State series to kind of treat him as that third starter, so he did a great job for preparing for that that opportunity and then the same preparation went into this (past) week against New Mexico, although it was one day less rest. But just preparing yourself as a starter is a little bit different than a bullpen guy, the (number of bullpens that you're going to do during the week and your throwing program. I think it lends itself to Ricky's success and he's done a great job. More importantly is just how competitive he is. He competes his tail off and our guys rally around him. He has a little bit of presence on the mound. Even in that 15-0 game (vs. New Mexico), there were a couple of big situations early in the game and he responded. He got a big strikeout and I'm sure you saw the fist pump and then the yelling and stuff. That energized our dugout to score some runs and he did a great job pitching that day, so yeah, he should be that guy moving forward. Hopefully, we continue to train him the right way to kind of hold down that position."

On the team's success against the Mountain West so far in the regular season:

"The Mountain West tournament started when we started conference play, so that's kind of been our motto the whole year. Each weekend is kind of a little micro-tournament and we've got to find a way to win those series in order to play at the back end of the season."

On whether playing 27 innings in 27 hours last weekend vs. New Mexico has helped the team:

"No, I don't think that helps anybody. I think the biggest concern we have right now is the health of our guys in two areas. Playing that many innings in the short amount of time can lend itself to injury, so I'm concerned about that every single day. But at the same time, I think making that decision was the right one as far as the COVID protocols, the testing and being able to compete in those series. Recent history tells us that. I think San Diego State has done a phenomenal job of putting us in a position to play these series week in and week out. Even though coaches might not like the schedule and players might not like the schedule, but it's in front of us, and I think our guys have just responded really well to the schedule and done a great job."

On what has been the key to the team's success so far:

"I always lean on the experience, you know, our guys don't get too hung up on a bad game, or a bad inning or whatever. Again, the leadership that we have in the program, the experience that we have gives a calming effect each opportunity we have week in and week out, inning to inning. I think when you watch our guys play, they play with a great deal of care. It's really fun to watch and they also don't get too weird about having a bad game or a bad inning. What I will tell is that in all of our six losses, five of those have been self-inflicted. Week to week, our guys are trying to repair those mistakes between each opportunity. Even this (past) weekend, we still we still made some mistakes. But I think the difference is that we didn't hang on to them too long and we found a way to sweep the series."

On what he's seen from Troy Melton in his first full season as a starter:

"Now this is his 11th career start and being a third-year player, that's kind of unusual for a guy that talented. So he's done a really nice job of learning his role of what he can and cannot do. But he says each outing is a learning opportunity for him and I think what we saw this past weekend is some growth. I think he located his fastball, which is paramount, and he threw strikes with his off-speed stuff and so that's where the growth has kind of started. He still has a long ways to go, but he didn't benefit from having (a full year), obviously, after missing last spring and last summer. Some of the marquee guys that have come here, like a (Stephen) Strasburg and those types of guys, have had those opportunities leading into their junior year. (Troy) hasn't had that, so this is kind of like his sophomore year and it's trial by error. (It's a) learning process each week and each outing is a growth opportunity for him and that's what we saw this (past) weekend. He's kind of made some adjustments and throwing his secondary pitches for strikes. He can also pitch really well up in the zone, which he's done really well in the past, and I think he commanded that really well and so we hope that continues moving forward because he's really good."

On Michael Paredes' success and if that is why Troy Melton is slotted second for doubleheaders:

"That's kind of why we did it. I think Mikey brings a little different type of energy that Troy might not have, but I also think that Troy benefits on game day learning those things that you can do to attack hitters. I think if it's a little different year, if it's a three-(day) weekend, the roles might be flipped a little bit where Troy might be pitching on a Friday and Mikey might be on Saturday. But I think what we have is two really, really good Friday night guys. Based on the fact that we're playing doubleheaders, I think it bodes well for Troy to kind of sit there and process what he sees in front of him, kind of plan out what his outing's going to look like and how to attack each guy, and I think it's benefited him as well for sure."

On Troy Melton's ability to watch a game and then put what he saw into practice during his starts:

"He's very intelligent; he processes stuff; he's very aware of what's going on around him, and he can put that to work. It might be unique to Troy, but I think a lot of guys would benefit from that as well throughout the country. But I definitely think Troy's unique to that. He's very intelligent and understands those things and I think he's also just learning how good he really is. He's as good as they get throughout the country, so hopefully he continues to grow and we benefit from that."

On what he attributes the decrease in walks over the last two series:

"I credit Coach (Sam) Peraza. What we did was reboot it and started over. Basically, we just completely wiped everything clean; we took all the stats away, and we started over. Our pitching staff embraced that and what Coach Peraza said was, 'we're rebooting the season, we're starting over.' We're kind of changing our mindset of what we're going to do and our pitching staff has embraced that. Coach Peraza holding them accountable to those standards, those expectations has shown through. So that's kind of changed, and our guys are starting to pitch to contact and what we're getting is weak contact for the most part. That's been the change, that's been the mindset. Coach Peraza's done a great job of rebooting the pitching staff, getting their mind set and focusing on the right stuff."

On Mike Jarvis' streak of multiple hits in eight straight games:

"Again, he's an older guy. I think the biggest thing for Mike is that he's kind of got comfortable with who he is and understanding that he doesn't have to try and create things. I think even before this hot streak, he kind of would watch his at-bats and he was giving away at-bats because he was swinging at pitches out of the zone. I think what he's done is he's kind of calmed himself down. He's getting pitches to hit; he's not panicking when it's strike one, or a guy flips in a breaking ball for a strike. I think the biggest difference is he's not swinging outside the strike zone. That's where the successes come and you start looking at his walk numbers. Not that they're gaudy or anything, but you can see that his walk numbers are starting to improve because he's not exiting the zone and even with two strikes, I think that's the difference as well. With two strikes, he was giving in and he was swinging outside the zone. Now with two strikes, balls that are being bounced or balls that are over his head or those kinds of things, he's not offering that. So he's not trying to do too much. He's calmed down, got really comfortable with who he is and he's not trying to create action. He's letting the game come to it to him and the results are kind of the proofs in the pudding."

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