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San Diego State Men's Basketball Press Conference Sept. 16, 2021

Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"Well, here I am still in the Zoom bunker. I thought we'd be doing these live by now, but soon enough we'll be enjoying pizza and a Diet Pepsi back here on The Mesa. But things are going good. We're working out with the team four hours a week on the court. We've got the schedule, for the most part, wrapped up, but are still looking for one additional game. It will probably be in between Christmas and the conference opener. We ended up with a bye week the first weekend of the season, so we're probably looking for some type of game, right after Christmas to get us ready for the conference opener. I'm extremely happy with how the schedule turned out. It's probably one of the most challenging things we do. Matt Soria does a great job scheduling for our program, and has been doing it for years. It's always a challenge trying to come up with a formula that gives us a chance to be an at-large team in the NCAA Tournament. We have opportunities to do that in November and December in the non-conference part of our schedule. Then we have the conference regular season to play ourselves in and we have three games in the conference tournament. So, we try to find the best route to continue to be an NCAA team, which we've done in nine of the last 11 or 12 years."

On the likelihood the one open date on the schedule could be filled by a non-Division I opponent:

"That would probably be my thought. I'm not locked into anything, but coming off Christmas break, I don't know if we'd want a high, high caliber game. So, we'd come back with more of a tune up game where it'll be challenging yet, it'll be more important to get our timing back after having three or four days off for Christmas."

On if this is as tough a non-conference schedule as he has ever put together:

"This is how you schedule when you have a lot of seniors on the roster, which we do, that want to play in games like this. You schedule like this when you've had success, and we've had great success at San Diego State. So, we're up for the challenge and we ask everybody to play. There isn't a team in the Pac-12 we don't ask, almost on a yearly basis, if they'll play. We got Arizona State this year. We try to go national, but I don't like traveling time zones. I'd like to get Pac-12 opponents. I'd like to get Big 12 opponents that are closer, Texas or somewhere we can get to without flying three time zones. But I couldn't pass up the Michigan game. They're going to be ranked in the top-10, maybe the top-five when we play them. To have that type of challenge with a veteran team, I thought was something the kids would like, that challenge. . . so we will take that challenge. Obviously playing at BYU, playing St. Mary's in a neutral (court), those are high quad games for us. It's not the Pac-12, but they are some of the best opponents in the West, and we will play those two teams. The Wooden Legacy is always a challenge and to open with Georgetown is going to be a lot of fun. And then we'll get either USC or Saint Joseph's which will be another challenging game. So, we've scheduled up and I like scheduling up. I know a lot of times fans are concerned that our schedule is not tough enough. Know this, we ask everybody to play, and we only can get those that want to play us."

On the game at Brigham Young on Nov. 12:

"Well that's a series I love, and I've talked to Coach Pope about continuing that series. I think both fan bases embrace it. They look at it as a high, high quad game against a rival school. Even with BYU moving over to the Big 12, I think it's a series that's good for both programs, and from the feedback I've got from Mark (Pope) that he likes the series, so hopefully it'll be something that continues. We beat them at their place two years ago. They beat us at our place last year so homecourt has not held up the last two meetings. Hopefully that continues and we can get into Provo and find a way to sneak out a win against a good BYU team."

On if he knows what the identity of his team is going to be:

" I like our talent level. We have size, strength, and maturity. We're going to be good, but until we start actually scrimmaging, playing five-on-five, I won't know how good we're going to be. (I'll have a better feel for it) when we play outside competition, whether that's a scrimmage or early games. How soon we hit our stride with this team, I'm not sure, but I know we have the talent. They work hard, but I also know I don't want to be competing at a super high level right now when we don't open until November 9. So, at some level I have to dial them back a little bit, even though we're only going four hours a week where we're teaching and we're doing skill development. We're working on fundamentals that will last the season without playing like we're opening the season next week. That's why until we start to scrimmage, when we start going an hour and a half or two hours on the floor, I really won't know what we're going to be."

On how the Saint Mary's game came together:

"(Saint Mary's head coach) Randy (Bennett) and I have the same problem. We're usually both very good, and we have a hard time finding games. So, when we go into scheduling, we're not looking to play each other, but at the end of the day we both need quality competition to give ourselves a shot in that large bid (to the NCAA Tournament). Over the last two years we've come together and said we have to play, because we have to play a hard schedule. So, we've decided again to meet on a neutral court. We're meeting them almost the same time we did a year ago, right after the finals break. So just like last year, we have finals before the game, and we will have nine days to get ready."

On adding UC San Diego to the schedule and not playing USD for the second year in a row:

"Scheduling is a great challenge. Right now UCSD is slotted in there. It's a game that I think San Diego will embrace. UCSD is making the move to Division I basketball. They give us a different look, and get us over there playing next year or two years from now, but it gives us a different in city opponent. Nothing against USD, we just felt that this game fit better for what we needed at this time."

On the newcomers and what they are learning at this point:

"What we're trying to teach them now what Aztec basketball is about. It's about defending at a high level, sharing the basketball, playing the right way, and that you have to sacrifice part of your game at times to win. We're developing the culture with this year's team, finding out where they fit. This is a hard-working group. Everybody we brought in laces them up and plays hard every day, so that encourages me that we have great senior leadership from guys that have been in the program, like a fifth year (player) Adam Seiko, Nathan Mensah, and Trey Pulliam guys have been in the program four and three years (respectively). Keshad Johnson in his third year as well."

On the opener against UC Riverside:

"People are going to see (UC) Riverside and think it's going to be an easy game. (In actuality) it's going to be a challenge to open our season against (UC) Riverside. We'll have a closed-door scrimmage against a Pac-12 team that will hopefully paint a picture for us where we're at. I like the idea of playing that scrimmage and giving us an idea of where we stand leading into the opener. I think by the time we get to BYU; we'll have a pretty good feeling of where we stand as a basketball team."

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