 **Head Coach Brian Dutcher**

**Opening Statement**

“Here we go, Aztec basketball right around the corner, and it’s exciting. You know I'm looking at the schedule and getting nervous but also looking forward to an opportunity to get out there and play some games. What we're doing this year is competing really hard in practice without trying to get anybody injured, and so far we've been successful at that. We have a lot of competition in every spot. Unlike most people, I'm not going in there predetermined saying this is who's going to get that spot. They’ve got to earn them. And so we started scrimmaging on Saturday, and I thought it was very good. The new guys got an opportunity to play actual game minutes against each other and that was fun to watch. We’ll scrimmage again this Saturday, and obviously on the 23rd we have closed scrimmage against UCLA. So we'll have plenty of opportunity to see where we're at as a team, and then go into a really competitive schedule. We open with Cal State Fullerton who were an NCAA tournament team, follow that with a home game against BYU, then go to Stanford, and then to Maui and open with Ohio State. So we're not easing in this year. We have to be game ready from the first one, and that's how we're preparing for the year.”

**On the point guards development:**

“It's great having Lamont Butler back for his third year. He's got a lot of minutes at the point, even though he shared it with Trey Pulliam last year. Then Darrion Trammell has come in and done a really good job in practice. You know, it's about getting comfortable. It was Terrell Gomez a couple of years ago it took them a while to get comfortable and once he did, he was dynamic. I think Darrion is getting more comfortable and it shows in his play every day in practice. He's more aggressive in knowing where his opportunities are going to come from. When you come to a program like this, sometimes you say, wow they're really good, I better find a way to fit– and after you fit, you start to excel, and he started to excel.”

**On Micah Parrish:**

“Micah has got great length and that always makes for a really good defender. He makes Matt Bradley's life hard every day in practice. Matt is big and strong and he's used to backing down these other guards and kind of shooting over them. Where Micah has the length to contest a lot of that. So yeah, Micah is doing a good job on defense. Probably fouling a little bit too much now, but he'll learn that when he gets those fouls in game, he's on the bench so he won't foul as often much longer. He's shooting the ball at a level that we thought he could– I think in the scrimmage, he hit three threes. So that's what we need. We need someone to step outside and make jump shots. A combination between he and Adam Seiko gives us a couple of really good shooters out there.”

**On Matt Bradley offensively:**

“Well, he was our leading scorer, second in assists, and second in rebounds. I’d just tell him to do the same thing. If he does the same thing, he's going to have another great year. I guess the area of improvement is to be more efficient. Try to be more comfortable when finding your opportunities. I think maybe just catch and shoot a little bit more, you know, run off some of these screens and if he’s open from three just take it. We all know how dynamic he is attacking off the dribble, so maybe just trying to get a little bit more comfortable at catching and shooting when he's open and then continue to play for others the way that he does. You know when your best offensive player is one of your best passers, it's a hard guy to guard and Matt is a really good passer and that's what makes him really hard to guard. Not only his ability to score, but when they double him he finds guys who are open for shots. So more of the same and hopefully with a little better efficiency.”

**On Matt Bradley’s development:**

“He just looks like he's more comfortable. Like he's happy to be out there. When you're making the transition as a transfer, you're trying to figure out where my role is, or how do I get on with these other guys? And now he's looking like a guy that's been in the program for 4 years. He's comfortable, he knows what his role is, and he's trying to improve in areas where he needed to improve in. We've had long talks on those, and I just think he looks more comfortable and more happy on the court. And hopefully that will lead to greater production from him.”

**On returning players:**

“I like the fact that guys that you think we’re playing their best basketball last year are getting better. The program guys. Adam Seiko was better than he was a year ago. Nathan Mensah was better than he was a year ago. Aguek Arop– better. Keshad Johnson –better. Lamont Butler –better. All these guys that are coming back, I think sometimes you say well, they played at a pretty good level last year, so everyone's excited about the newcomers. But when the returners get better, we get better. And I think everybody I just said has gotten better from where they were a year ago and that should excite all of us.”

**On returning players’ improvement:**

“Focus, energy, and concentration. I always tell them that physically you are who you're going to be at this point. Justin Landry does a great job of strength and conditioning. They're physically strong, but I don't know that's much different than where it was a year. ago. It's the ability to concentrate, to know your role, and to excel at what you do really well. I think they're all getting to that level, where Aguek is more efficient in there, knowing how to play and knowing how to score. Adam is just playing with such great pace by waiting for screens, coming off screens, knowing how to read the defense– just all the things we've tried to grow over the years. We don't roll it out and play. We spent a lot of time on skill development. We teach and like any class, the more you're in that class, the more you're taught, and the better you get. These guys have been taught a lot, it seems like they've learned those lessons and just continue to get better.”

**On Darrion Trammell:**

“He's done great. I mean, he's hard to guard. I was at a function last week talking to people and I said that if I was Darrion and I was Lamont, I would get together and say, go ahead and take it easy on me today. Those two guys go at it every day, it's like a prize fight. So they're getting tested every day. I can't believe any defense they're going to see in the regular season is going to frustrate them based on how they've gotten to each other on a daily basis. And I mean, we're eventually going to put them on the floor together– right now for competition and for development we have them going at each other. But Darrion has adjusted to Lamont’s defense, which is as good as there’s played in the conference. He's finding ways to score the basketball and to get teammates involved. The only thing with Darien I tell him, is don't get frustrated. Sometimes he turns it over, and he might drop his head a little bit. With our program, we just make the next play and don't worry about what just happened, and I think he's getting that a little bit better. Now he's not getting frustrated when things don't go exactly right for him on the floor.”

**On crafting the starting lineup:**

“I think as we move closer to the regular season, we'll start putting a group together we think has earned the right to start, and that might have to be earned every week. We have a lot of players and we're extremely deep. I always say that it is a players’ dilemma and a coach’s delight. We have a lot of players and we have tremendous depth. So there's going to be competition all throughout the season. We can go to the bench. Hopefully we'll have an ability to wear teams down with just running numbers down and I'm not afraid to do that. If we have enough players that deserve to play, they'll find their way onto the floor.”

**On Trammell being undersized affecting the switching defensive scheme:**

“We did that with Terrell Gomez a little bit. He'd switch and then we’d double switch– we’d scram him out and get a bigger guy on the rolling post. A lot of the time that’s scout specific, but it's something we talked about, and we have to continue to work on it. We don't want a small guard on a big, but if they front and we give him backside help, sometimes we can get away with it. Darrion’s a tough guy and what he lacks in height, he makes up for in aggressiveness and toughness. He will be a guy I don't think a lot of people will try to pick on.”

**On Jaedon LeDee:**

“Jaedon looked good. As much as you're a redshirt, it's a whole different thing when you step on the court. Now you're playing and running all our set plays– you're not running what other teams are running. But Jaedon has been a beast on the glass. He's hard to guard in the low post and I really like Jaedon’s ability to drive and pass the ball. He's a very good passer off the dribble. So now he's like everybody else. He's just got to find a comfort level when he's playing with all these other guys to pick and choose his opportunities: where he can be aggressive and where he just needs to pass the ball and move on to the next play. He's getting a feel for that and also, defensively, he's got to grow his game. He's got to get better defensively, and we've shown him the things that we feel are important that he do better. So that when we get into this type of competition that we're about to face, he's ready to go with that.”

**On the new video board:**

“I loved it. I just thought it would be a huge distraction during timeouts. I have to turn the way they're facing maybe because now that they have the lower boards in there, they can see it from the bench. I'll be talking and they'll be watching for a highlight dunk they just had. So, if I want to say that we're going to turn the bench around the other way, where they can't see it because they'll be watching themselves in timeouts.”

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