****

**Head Coach Brian Dutcher:**

**Opening Statement:**

“Aztec basketball is here. We have a scrimmage Sunday with UCLA we're excited about, and this weekend’s practice has been a little disjointed– we had some guys out who got their booster shots and so they were out a day or two. So, it's been a little disjointed, but we'll get back at full strength on Thursday leading into the UCLA scrimmage and then leading into the exhibition game November 1st and then the opener on November 7. We’re excited where we are. We know expectations are high. Now the polls are starting to come out and put more pressure on an old coach, but we're excited for that and we're ranked high because I keep telling everybody we're good. Now we have to go out and be good.”

**On Jaedon LeDee:**

“Jaedon was imposing physically from the second he stepped on campus. Then on the scout team, we let him be the best player on whatever team we played. When he was Orlando Robinson from Fresno, he scored every time on us in the block. When he was another player on the perimeter, he would score the ball. But now the problem is that he's not running Fresno offense or UNLV offense, he's running San Diego State offense. So, he's got a learning curve where he's trying to learn how we do things on the offensive end, and yet play with great freedom that I give players to do. His greatest skill is his size and strength, but he has a motor – he's a play hard guy. We might not have run a play for him and all of a sudden, he'll end up with a ball on the offensive glass or he'll run the floor and beat everyone down the floor. His energy and his motor are probably what separates him along with his physical size and strength.”

**On being ranked high in the preseason polls:**

“We want expectations to be high, that's what this program is. We've worked hard to get it there. We don't want to be the team where we look up and we're picked last and have great satisfaction when we finish eighth. We want to be picked first and we want to finish first. Last year, obviously, Boise had the magical year, and they won all the close games, three of them against us – and they won the title. We have to find a way to make that us this year, where we win close games, we perform at a high level, and we hang another banner.”

**Mindset going into closed scrimmage with UCLA:**

“I think last year when we scrimmaged them, we didn't really go over anything other than their personnel before the scrimmage. This year we'll do a scout out. We'll look at what they ran last year because I want to see how we do when we’re prepared for a game. We're right into the fire with this year's schedule: BYU, Stanford, Fullerton, and Maui. We can’t ease in, so we'll prep for them this time. We beat them the year before at our place and I felt when we played at UCLA last year, they prepared for us. They knew what we were running. They doubled some stuff. That's how they approached it and we didn't. This year we're going to approach it that way, not because of what happened last year in the scrimmage, but because we have a really hard schedule right away. I want to see how the new guys handle a scout. When we tell them we want to take this away, then they have to take it away. If we just let them play and play to our principles, we won't really know how they handle a scout– so we're going to scout in prep for UCLA for Sunday.”

**On scrimmaging against UCLA in the past and present:**

“UCLA, in how many years, they never played a road game in the state of California. They haven't played in years and years. Because of COVID, because we both got out of MTE’s somewhere across the country, Mick Cronin said I'll come play you down there. It was a tremendous favor to us and I'm grateful for that and playing against each other. It's good for both of us, who each have very good programs. It's the kind of test you want in the early season to get yourself ready for regular season play. It's something that I think could go on for years. I hope we'll play each other again, if it's not in an MTE, but it's great to test your team against a really well coached team and a really talented team.”

**On future scrimmages with UCLA:**

“I'm sure the assistants will have opinions, but Mick and I will get on the phone, and we'll decide if we want to play again. We’re friends. I don’t know, we scrimmaged you USC back-to-back years. We’ve scrimmaged UCLA in the past before Mick was there. I think you're just trying to find a really good game, against a really good team to see where you're really at. The exhibition games are fine, but they're a whole different dynamic. They're more like let's get in a game routine, let's show them what warmups are, and let's go through our gameday prep in the building. That way when they step on the floor against Fullerton it's not the first time they're going to be in Viejas with a bunch of people in the stands and a whole different feel about it. So, it’s less about the exact competition but more of a game day feel. Each one provides value. Obviously, UCLA will be, without giving any disrespect to San Diego Christian, will be the more challenging competition.”

**On USD’s hiring of Steve Lavin to head coach affecting SDSU’s schedule:**

“I don't have any plans right now to add USD to the schedule. We have another Division I school in the city, UCSD, and they were willing to play us two for one. To get two home games and only one road game makes more sense to us. It'd be different if USD was ranked and if the metrics matched up, but for us to go into USD, have a sold-out crowd, and run the risk of losing that game– if their RPI and their numbers are in the two hundreds, it doesn't make sense to take a road game. We would never do that with anybody else in the state. It's no disrespect to him, and I'm sure he'll build it up to the point where it will be a conversation– but right now, with UCSD willing to play us two for one, it makes more sense to do that.”

**On what challenges UCLA might bring on Sunday:**

“I mean it's a point guard in Tyger Campbell who’s played a ton of college basketball. It's Jaquez Jr. who's probably the preseason Player of the Year in the Pac-12, who’s got NBA talent. It’s Bona, a new freshman that’s going to be tough and good, and we'll see what how they handle that challenge going against a really good freshman. Then it's Mick. Mick’s teams have a personality– they play with toughness, they're aggressive, and they're going to change up a game plan. They'll switch every screen, and they'll double ball screens, and they're going to make us make adjustments for a scrimmage– if he chooses to do so. I'm not going to call him and ask him what he's going to do. We'll just get out there to react to what he does. But this is a team that's very talented, and very well coached.”

**On things to look forward to for this scrimmage and the upcoming season:**

“It’s probably seeing how much slippage we have with the new guys. The veterans have played a lot of games at San Diego State, so I kind of have a feeling what to expect from them– hopefully just at a one-step higher level. It's the new guys when all of a sudden, we're not practicing and we're actually playing, how many mistakes are made, or is the moment too big for them at the time. I'm really excited to see as the season goes on, who's going to close games for us. Games are going to be games with equal opportunity, but with two or three possessions left in the game and it’s close, where am I going to put the ball? Where's the team going to put the ball? Is it Matt? Is it going to be Darrion, is it Keshad, who is it? Seeing who's going to close games for us. I'm excited to see who that is. We don't know who it’s going to be. It's like the football saying: you know who you think you are until you get punched in the nose, and then you find out who you are, so we'll see what we are. I have an idea of what we are but until we face competition and get punched in the nose, only then will we see what we are.”

**On the benefits of scrimmaging UCLA:**

“It's fantastic. It's great because you're going to get a play team like UCLA, like you said, that we're not going to see this year. The schedule didn't work out but we're still going to get to play them to see how we measure up and where we're at. So instead of playing the same scrimmages all the way and then playing the soft schedule, we're going to play against a really good team and we're going to kind of know what we are. We're going to come back and either say, wow, we're better than we hoped we’d be– or we're going to come back and go, we have eight miles to go before we play a game and we have so much work to do. We'll get that answer when we scrimmage.”