****

**Head Coach Brian Dutcher:**

**Opening Statement:**

“We’re basically a week away from our exhibition game now. We had our closed-door scrimmage against UCLA and we learned a lot about the team. I’m excited for this year's group. I liked the fact that we got behind and found a way to come back and tie it at halftime. I don't like the fact we were behind 18-2, but I liked the fact we fought back and tied it up at halftime 45 all. Then, a really competitive second half against a really good UCLA team– There’s things you want out of a closed-door scrimmage. You want to see kind of where you're at– we found that out. You want to find areas you need to grow in– we found those areas. Then you want to get through without anyone getting hurt and both teams came through it without anybody getting hurt. So, we're already in the film room watching and learning from it. That's the great thing about this group. They want to be taught; they want to learn. They're not excuse-makers. They want to be coached and we’ll coach them hard this week and try to get better leading into the regular season that starts November 7, against Cal State Fullerton.

**On getting closer to determining the starting five:**

“We'll go through this next exhibition leading into the regular season. I mean, I started Keshad [Johnson], Lamont [Butler], Darrion [Trammell], Matt [Bradley], and Nathan [Mensah], and I didn't start Jaedon [LeDee]-- and then you look up and I think Jaden probably played the most minutes other than Darrion. So sometimes you get caught up on who starting instead of who's finishing and this will be a fun group to figure that all out. I played all 12 guys. All 12 scholarship guys played in the scrimmage, and we wanted to win– you always want to win– but we didn't want to try to win at the expense of not seeing what we had on the floor. A lot of different combinations and I liked what we saw. I guess I was most intrigued with playing Keshad as a small forward because he's so good, and Jaedon is so good. That's a position that seems to be where the most competition is and then Elijah Saunders, our freshman, had seven points in the first half in six minutes. So, we're really deep at that power forward stretch-four position. We got to find a way to play a bigger lineup at times and get them all on the floor.”

**On Matt Bradley’s skill set:**

“Whether I call isolation for Matt or not, he seems to find his way into isolation. He's good at it. Sometimes coaches over-coach their team. Matt knows what he's good at, he was second on the team in assists so I liked the ball in his hands, he can score a lot of hard shots, and so he's going to have to be not only a great scorer but a great playmaker for us this year.”

**On offensive woes translating to this year:**

“We want to score. Like I said, nobody likes offense better in me. So yeah, we struggled to score sometimes last year. This year, to put up 87 is the good news and then you give them 89 and you're like, what happened to the number two defense in the country? Sometimes when you score quicker, the other team has more possessions and they're going to score more points. So that was kind of fun to watch. Down the stretch, we got beaten because we fouled them almost every possession, and we gave up offensive rebounds– even though we were out-rebounding them by 10. Plus, we had 20 offensive rebounds. Those are two good rebounding teams and so we have to clean a lot of stuff up going into the regular season, but I think we’ll get there.”

**On the benefits of having transfer students:**

“We had trouble scoring the ball and so when you can take someone from another team that averages 18 points a game and six assists, those numbers translate. Sometimes you take a high school kid, and you have to project what they're going to be. But when you take a college transfer, you could watch tape, see him against college competition, and kind of know what you're getting. So, Darrion has not disappointed. He’s everything we thought he would be. He's a dynamic scoring guard. The thing he has to do is obviously, I told both he and Lamont, they have to try to find a way to be two assists-to-one turnover. I think Lamont had six assists, but he had five turnovers. Darrion had three assists, but he had three turnovers. We have to have those guys be closer to two-to-one for us to have the kind of year we want to have, and I think they will be.”

**On UCLA’s Tyger Campbell:**

“Tyger [Campbell] was sensational. I mean, with [Johnny] Juzang and some of the pieces they had last year, you're typically more of a pure point guard. To me, he looked like Malachi [Flynn]. He could turn his offense up at any time. He's not afraid to find people, he's a good passer– but he looks like he's trying more to score this year, which they need him to do. Tyger’s only ever done what the coach wants him to do and I talked to Mick and he's really excited about what he's seen in the four, five, or six weeks of practice leading into our scrimmage. He says Tyger’s been dynamic for him, and he was dynamic in the scrimmage.”

**On any surprises following the scrimmage:**

“I was hoping we'd be a good rebounding team and I think we will be. I think we're going to really attack the offensive glass. That's even against teams that do a good job boxing out. I think we're strong and physical, so I think we're going to be a good offensive-rebounding team. We're a better running team. We really got up and down the floor against UCLA, and obviously, that led to 87 points. So, I thought we were running better. Those are two things that I’d hope we do better and we kind of did in the first look at the team. Now we have to continue just to be what we have to be to win important games and that's good in the half-court execution. Good teams aren't going to let you run up and down the court all of the time. They are going to make it a half-court game and now we have to have better timing and better execution in the half-court. We had game slippage. I knew that would happen– guys are too anxious to move through the place, or too quick instead of being more precise and a little slower. That stuff is what we’ll work on this week: having better timing, being more conscious as to when you go, setting bodies, screens with physical bodies, and stuff like that. You just know from doing it all these years, it takes time.”

**On giving up 89 points to UCLA:**

“Yeah, I don't want to give up 89. I just liked the spread. We didn't make them score baskets, we put them on the foul line constantly. They're good, I mean, there are some things I wanted to see in the scrimmage that I might have changed in the game. But I wanted to see if we could stop certain things just being basic– if this was a game I'd have probably found a way to double Tyger Campbell on ball screens and make someone else beat us. We didn't do that, we switched some, we fought over, and he was dynamic. Then you have [Jaime] Jaquez Jr., and you're talking about two preseason PAC-12 players, both first-team conference, and they played like it. One had 31 and one had 26 and they were dynamic. We didn't want to let them score that many, but we probably, had we been in a game, would have changed up a few things not to let those two play the way they did against us.”

**On running the ball better:**

“I would say every team in the country, 360-and-something teams, start the season saying they want to run better. I said only about 10 end up doing it, so are we going to be one of those 10 teams that can run better? We put time into it, it doesn't just happen. You don't just say run harder, we spent most of the summer and into the fall working on our running game. Now obviously you start losing some of that as you start preparing. You're getting your half-court offense together; you're preparing for other teams. The question is can we carry all that over, all the work we put in, into the season? So, if said Sunday was any indication, I'm encouraged by the way we ran the ball.”

**On if defense effects the transition offense:**

“I think we score less points because of our defense. Teams take 30 seconds to get a shot up sometimes. Against other opponents, they might get an earlier quick look, but we make it so hard that games get shortened because our defense is usually good enough. It slows the other team down and slows the tempo of the game because we guard so hard, and we're hard to score against. That limits possessions sometimes. Hopefully, we can run even though we're going to guard hard with limited possessions where we can still run and try to get easy baskets for.”

**On the disrespect surrounding being ranked 19th in the nation:**

“I like the fact that we said we're 19th or 20th and we're getting disrespected. That’s great respect, so I love it. We have high expectations. That's where we want to be, and that's where we expect to be. Like I said, we got 19 places to climb, we want to climb the pole. Obviously, there's 200-and-something in the other direction and we don't want to go in that direction. We want to try to be the best version of ourselves.”

**On the possible implementation of an NCAA summer league:**

“We played a Swish summer league here in town, they have different leagues you can play in, and then they have them in LA, so I think it's good for the guys. There’s so much more about basketball now as they get individual trainers and they just work on their individual games, but at some level, you have to play five-on-five to be good at basketball. I like opportunities where they can play competitive five-on-five games over the summer. So, if that's something that the NCAA thinks is important, then I'd be in favor of it.”

**On gameday routine:**

“It's more about the routine. Here's what time you get to an Aztec game. Here's how we warm up. Here's what’s expected. So, when we get Fullerton, it's not the first time they've gone through our game day routine. I liked the closed-door scrimmage, the competition was great, but now it's about routine. I'm a big routine guy. You're here an hour and a half before the game, then we're stretching 60 minutes before the game. Every game, you've got to prepare the same for every game. You can't show up late for one and then be five minutes late for stretching, and then expect to be the same team. In that regard, as much freedom as I give them on the offensive end, as far as routine, I'm pretty rigid. So, I like to get them ready for a game day routine.”

**On things to look forward to in the upcoming scrimmage:**

“Probably playing to the best of our ability. We'll get everybody in again. Hopefully, it's the kind of game where I can look at all 12 guys and give everybody an opportunity to play so I can get a real evaluation of what they're doing in game minutes. Then just see that whatever deficiencies we had against UCLA, we’ve improved on. It sounds like turnovers were an issue, I wasn't happy, but we only had 13 against a team that's really good. So it's not that high. But it's who had them. I didn't like the fact that Darrion and Lamont had eight of the 13. They are my primary handling guards, so I want them to be better with the ball and more cautious. Maybe at the expense of making the spectacular play, I want them to be sure with the ball.”

**On utilizing depth to their advantage:**

“That's what we're going to have to find out. You're going to have to play games to find out all that. I want to play fast at the offensive end and then defensively, we decided we're gonna get out and pressure more, and use our depth to our advantage trying to wear teams down. We have a lot of players, so that's something we're looking at to try and maybe extend our defense a little bit more.”

**On if having fewer COVID restrictions this year can affect home attendance:**

“I think we'll have a better chance. I wish the Padres were in the World Series but they're not playing, so if people are looking for something to do, come to an Aztec game. Hopefully, we'll fill the building up and people will be excited to be back in Viejas without all of the restrictions they've had to deal with in the past and we'll have full houses for most of the games.”

**On if the team has the potential to go 30-2:**

“I'd love that. I'd love to think that. That's part of the journey. I know we've scheduled thinking we're going to be really good. So, the question is can we answer those expectations, and we won't know that until we play.”