



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

5500 CAMPANILE DRIVE, SAN DIEGO, CA 92182 | (619) 594-5547

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Head Coach Brady Hoke:

Opening Statement:

"I thought we gave a really great effort, not just the other night but last week in practice. Our mental and physical toughness and the cornerstones that we believe in, our preparation during the week was really good. Coming off a short week, the team was struggling a little bit and we were on a little bit of a high from San Jose, but our veterans of our football team have done an excellent job the last six weeks and I really appreciate what they've put in, work wise and from a mental standpoint.

Offensively, I think our execution was good. I think it was better than it has been. I think the communication and preparation was really good. Negatively, we failed to convert on the fourth and one, and that's something that we've tried to take a lot of pride in and Jeff's really done that with the offense. So we're a little upset about that. And then we have too many loss yardage plays. We keep talking about our rushing yards and we want to rush, and we got closer, obviously, but when you have negative plays, sacks and TFLs, that sets you back as far as your execution with a rhythm offensively. The positives, there was 177 yards rushing, a lot of points scored, scored on both drives to start the halves, which we wanted to do. We thought it was important that we start fast because you don't want to give them any hope. That's just how it is. You look at the time of possession, nice job there and kept the ball, we did have the one turnover. Third down conversions were right near 50%. We were two for two in the red zone. We made some big plays, chunk plays, and offensively probably one of our better football games and 34 points is always good.

Defensively, we were a little bit soft in our coverage. That was something at halftime that we really talked about. We played a little more coverage three than normal and at the corners we needed to play a little tighter. Our pad level on some things early weren't good. From a technical standpoint, the slide protection, we didn't react the way we would have hoped we did, and especially on false slide because we had worked really hard during the week, so we got to clean that up a little bit. We held them under 100 yards rushing, that it's always something that we wanted to do. You know, we're 100% on third down conversion. And that is the first time I've ever been on a team that's been 100% on third downs. I thought we tackled very well in space. I think for what they were doing option football wise, we handled it pretty well. And I think we were disciplined in what we needed to do."

On Mekhi Shaw receiving a scholarship:

"We had one left to give, and he stood out. You look at what he's done in the last six weeks, every day how he practiced, returning kicks and punts and all that kind of stuff, and just the effort that he gives. He earned it. I've been thinking about it for about three weeks. And I just think he did a great job. You can tell other players are pretty happy for him."

On what makes Michael Shawcroft so effective on defense:

“He's so instinctive. He does a great job of preparing for the game. I also think his coach might be the best guy preparing the position to play the game that I've ever been around. Mike is a guy who loves the game, he wants to play well. He's physical. Mike's biggest problem is he's got a leg that bothers him sometimes and so we got to rescue him a little bit, but he's very instinctive.”

On Shawcroft's toughness etc.

“It just tells you who he is. Not just on game day, but when we practice. He stands around the defense and mimics every call as a linebacker. He's 30 yards away, but he's back there moving around and getting in a position he should be in. He's a guy that loves the game. I think his dad's a coach. He's been a great leader. He's one of those guys who guys listen to because of the respect they have for him.”

On Shawcroft's last year of eligibility and whether or not they expect him back:

“I hope so. We're going to have a couple meetings during the week with a bunch of guys and see where they're at and see where we're at. With the portal being available, at the same time, we're going to look at it and see if we got some guys who want to go that way. And, you know, obviously, it's a tool for everybody now.”

On coaching at this level:

“I think this has been a developmental program. We're going to get some good guys, we get some on bounce backs also, which we have been able to get from guys who have left San Diego for somewhere else but at the end of the day, they come back to San Diego. That's gratifying. It's gratifying to give a kid a scholarship, a guy who's earned it, a guy with character and the work ethic that Mekhi shows, same thing with Jack Browning. We're going to be excited to have Jack back for another year. That was a good decision early in the year. That's one thing you got to do, you got to recruit your own guys.”

On beating Air Force the last 9 times and the key to stopping them:

“Each year has been different. Last year, defensively we held on, we didn't have a great offensive production. We did some things in special teams, and we did some things defensively but, I think every year is different. They have a different team. We have a different team. We'll be prepared. It'll be fun. I love playing option teams. It's fun.”

Senior Wide Receiver Jesse Matthews:

On Mekhi Shaw receiving a scholarship:

“Yeah, Mekhi is awesome. He obviously deserved it. I knew that he was going to get one since last year. Just the way he works and is a really quiet kid, kind of reminds me a lot of myself when I was younger. Just the skill set you can bring to the table and watching it develop over the last couple of years, it's been really awesome. I think a lot of people don't realize that. He came in as a defensive back and the spring of his freshman year he came over to the receivers and from day one he has been willing to learn and try to just take any knowledge that we give him. So, he is very deserving of the scholarship.”

On what Mekhi was like as a corner:

“That was the COVID season, so it was just a weird season, and I don't remember too much. He actually started as a scout wide receiver for the defense that year. So, I guess he was kind

of cutting up the defense a bit and they took notice and thought he would have a better shot playing receiver. I don't remember too much about going against him because he's a little younger, but he's turned into a great receiver and contributor to this team."

On his start as a member of the scout team in the program:

"Yeah. Going against one of the best defenses in the country definitely helps you sharpen your skills and become a better player."

On if he serves as a mentor to Mekhi Shaw:

"Yeah, I think that's my job just to kind of answer the questions he has. He asked me about certain routes or certain plays, but he's also a very knowledgeable kid, he picks up the offense really fast. His major is something crazy, but he's a smart kid. So, he picks up things pretty fast and he's, you know, doesn't really say too much. He's a very humble kid so to see someone like that get what they deserve is really cool to see."

On deciding whether to return and utilize his COVID year or not:

"Yeah, I still haven't made a decision yet. I've kind of been going back and forth on it. You know I have to talk to my family about it, talk to the coaches, you know, it's a big decision for me. I just have to weigh my options, especially me and my future. Obviously, I love being in San Diego and I have been blessed to play here for five years. Having the option to come back is something that's really awesome. But like I said, I have to talk to my family about it and I try to focus on the season and focus on Air Force and finish the season the right way, in the way that these seniors deserve to finish and play the best football we can. So, I think I'll give it a little bit more thought maybe next week. Leading up to the ball game and you know, after the season's officially finished."

On whether his decision will be made before the Bowl Game:

"Most likely not, I'll say that. It's kind of a big decision for me so I'll say probably after the bowl game."

On the SDSU Basketball teams' success:

"I think they're awesome. I watched the game last night against Ohio State and they got a lot of depth and a lot of play makers in those transfers who know how to put the ball in the basket so it's fun watching them play. I take a lot of pride in our sports programs and seeing represent our school so well, it's really cool to see. We cheer them on and it's motivating for us to see them do so well."

On whether the two teams (Football and Basketball) interact with each other:

"Yeah, I'll say hi, every now and then, but our schedules don't really overlap. I see them in the training room every now and then, but they spend a lot of time in the JAM center. So, we don't really see them too much, they are kind of in their own bubble but it's cool seeing them every now and then."

On the fun of being apart of an offense that is spreading the ball around:

"It's a lot of fun. Just getting everybody involved like you said, against San José State, we had three receivers scored touchdown. I don't know the last time that's happened. So that was really cool to see and just being able to convert on third downs, keep possession of the ball and keep our defense of the field, which was a huge problem the first half of the year. It's been really fun and just really gratifying you know, to see our hard work finally paying off and getting those results we so desperately wanted."

On if he crossed paths with Michael Shawcroft in high school football:

"I didn't see him in the high school football, but we went to the same trainer. So, I saw him at the gym and offseason stuff, and you know he was someone that wasn't always the biggest, fastest, strongest but he's someone that always had great work ethic. He's my workout partner throughout college too as we go in the off season. Me and him every morning so I have gotten to know Michael really well and develop a good relationship with him. He's also my locker buddy, he's right next to me so Michael is a great player, someone who is very mentally tough. Just thinking of all the injuries, he has had to overcome, and he keeps bouncing back and is a big player for this team. I think it speaks a lot to his character like Jonah said and what kind of person he is."

On what Michael Shawcroft is like off the field:

"He is kind of a goofball. He loves making jokes, keeping things lighthearted, never taking himself too seriously. He is also a very caring person, and he cares about you and your mental or physical health. He's always checking in, so he is a really great person. I'm glad I befriended him on this journey."

On Coach Cooper and wide receiver success:

"One more thing about Mekhi earning a scholarship. That's our third receiver in the last four years that has been put on scholarship. I think one thing that is pretty notable about that is we have all had the same coach and that's Coach Cooper. I think it speaks a lot to his development of young men and what he has been able to do with us young receivers that have been walk-ons. I just want to give him his flowers and his roses for what he has done for not only me but all the receivers in the room and how he develops young men and football players. I think it is very special and should not only be noticed but should be celebrated. He is a great coach and I just want to give him a quick shoutout."

Senior Defensive Lineman Jonah Tavai:**On getting to play with his brother this season:**

"It's been a complete blessing to have him on the same field as me. Not just the same field with me, but the same team this time around compared to last few years. It definitely made everything a lot easier for my family as well. They love watching us both play at the same time. They don't have to pick and choose where to go now. We're right here. In San Diego, two hours away from home. And for them to be able to come down to watch both of his play has definitely been a true blessing for them as well."

On the defensive front losing so many seniors leading into next year:

"Especially for the front six, attitude is everything. They have definitely picked up the work ethic that we try to instill into all of our young guys. We have a great group of d-lineman coming back, a great group of linebackers coming back. Garrett Fountain moving down to D-line has been phenomenal. Nassir has been stepping up, Cyrus has played well, and Cooper has done well for the linebacker group. They're still going to be solid. They're going to grow and learn, and they're definitely going to try to beat everybody before them. I'm looking forward to what they do next year as well."

On facing a unique challenge in Air Force's offense:

"The biggest challenge is just being disciplined ourselves. Watching last year's game, we had a couple offsides penalties early in the game. Things like that are going to hurt you. One of them was pretty early in the game, second and five, automatic first down and that's what they want,

we just have to be as disciplined as we can. They will force any crease that they find, and they have been doing a great job with that all year. They got a good running game and good running backs. They got a good o-line that comes off the ball like no other o-line has been in our conference, with how they go down and get to the second level. Stopping those inside runs with our defense is definitely going to be the biggest challenge. But we're doing good as of now. Watching as much film as we're doing. Coaches are putting in a great game plan for us and we're going to go out there and execute."

On how Air Force has changed since last season:

"From the film that I've watched this year, they're getting to the second level really well. The tackles are athletic, the centers are athletic, they're getting up pretty fast. Staying on their blocks. They did that last year, so I can't really say they've been doing a much better job, but they're almost doing a great job with that. It's not that they're greater than they were last year, but they're good every single year so it's just another challenge for us."

On Michael Shawcroft and his season so far:

"So, me and him have been really close since I've been here. He's actually my roommate now this year. The thing that I've seen the most out of him is he has a great motor, he's strong, and he's fast. But his IQ for the game is really high. He can predict plays. He knows where to be and when to be there. His film study is good. But his IQ has been great ever since I've been here. He's been showing great talent since he's been here, and he's definitely become one of the best defenders on our defense right now."

On Michael Shawcroft's IQ:

"You always have natural instinct to be a great football player. I really think his instincts for the game and his nose for the ball is off the charts and has been since we got here, and it's only been growing since we've been here."

On Michael Shawcroft bouncing back from injuries:

"He's been through he's been through a lot and you know he's bouncing back. He's not just bouncing back to come out here and be another person on the team. He's bouncing back to be our tackle leader. A guy that we can rely on to make plays during the run game in the pass game. He's a good blitzer off the edge in the middle. He knows when to get his body up to make plays. He's a great football player and he's been through a lot of adversity. He's always coming back. So that just shows the character that he has."