



## **SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS**

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### **Head Football Coach Brady Hoke:**

#### **Opening Statement:**

“Before I get started on San Diego State football, I'd like to give our deepest condolences to the Leach family and the Mississippi State football family. Mike was one of a kind, he was a good guy to be around. The coaching fraternity is a very tight community and Mike will be missed and so our thoughts and prayers are with him and with his family. I think he had three girls and a boy, and I know his son is working at Mississippi State. We give them all our blessings and all our thoughts.

On good news, it's going to be fun going to Hawaii. I hope those that are going in this room, I hope you enjoy it and have a good time. Since the announcement, I think our players in the last few weeks have been lifting and running more. We practiced last Friday and Saturday and we are trying to keep that edge, keep that mentality. We are also doing a great job with our young guys and helping them get better and so we look forward to the bowl game. It's one more game for our seniors and one more game for us to go play and compete and win for our seniors. Christmas Eve, we're the only show in town besides Santa. I think that will give a lot of people, including my mom in Dayton, Ohio and the 90-year-old fans that we have, they'll be watching the game. Happy to be playing in Hawaii obviously and happy for the players that we have from the islands and from Hawaii. There are six of them and Savai'i Eselu, our tight ends coach, it will be great for them to play in front of their loved ones and be there. Obviously, this is our 12th bowl game in 13 years. We've been bowl eligible for 13 years and I take a lot of pride in that first bowl game and playing second bowl in 2010 that we were able to go to.

When you look at our opponent, Middle Tennessee is a very good football team, and their season was very similar to how our season went. The route of the Conference USA, which is a very good conference they've won. They started three and four, they've gone four and five down the stretch and now they're seven and five overall. There's a lot of similarities and they are very explosive offensively. They've thrown for over 3000 yards, but they're very physical at the point of attack on the line of scrimmage. They passed for 19 touchdowns and rushed for 20 touchdowns. On defense, they're very aggressive, they have 81 tackles for loss in 34 sacks and they turn the ball over. They have 17 interceptions and eight fumble recoveries, their fifth in the country in turnover margin. I think the one that gets your attention is that they have blocked four punts this year. They are very aggressive in the special teams, and I think they're well coached. They also ran back two punts, I think, and a kickoff for a touchdown. They're a really explosive football

team. We're excited about it, excited about going to Hawaii obviously, but more excited to get able to play one more for our seniors.”

**On Middle Tennessee’s Quarterback and team in general:**

“He's really good, very accurate. I do think you know when you look at their personnel that their receivers are really good, their running backs are really good players. I think they had 15 guys recognized in the Conference USA you know, either freshman of the year or so, so they were well represented. I mean, their punter, he’s just like Jack, I mean, he has great command of the ball and great leg strength.”

**On the Hawai’i players getting to play in Hawai’i:**

“They're excited about it, the ones who are there, Alama (Uluave’s) family, and (Seyddrick) Lakalaka, I promise you they are really excited about playing at home and playing in front of their family and friends. One thing I'll tell you in both families, it'll be interesting in how they get all the tickets for that group that’s going to be there.”

**On the upcoming signing day:**

“It will be somewhere between, because you've got another portal date after spring football, probably 18 or maybe 23. There will be some portal guys, I hope. I think Defensive Line, when you lose both of the Tavais, going to lose Banks. [Daniel] Okopoko will be back, and Garrett [Fountain] will be back so there’s some real experience over the past two years at that position. There were some pretty good defensive linemen that were able to rotate in and out. So, that’s what we need to build back up.”

**On Jonah Tavai receiving Second Team Associated Press All-American recognition:**

“You know, number one, we're tickled to death for him. I mean, his work ethic and how he led as a captain for us. He's done an unbelievable job. It speaks volumes. You know, it's funny. Last night, his older brother was playing for the Patriots. And so, you know, I'll have a good discussion with Jonah when I see him today about how he thought his brother played. Having Justus here, you know, it's been neat. I was thinking about it this morning because of the brother tandems. It's really been neat so it's great. I think when you look at Cam, the accolades he got and Jonah. You know, I really think Keshawn Banks the last six games played really, really well. So, we're just, you know, tickled for him.”

**On seeing former players, like Cam Thomas, finding success in the NFL:**

“Yeah, you know, it’s exciting. It’s a big part of your recruiting also. We talked about D line being a position we need to get after and recruit. I think you look at what Cam does, I think he had a strip sack last night and it was funny because I was on the phone with a defensive line recruit and I asked him if he was watching and the Cardinals and he was, so I said ‘Well, 97 there, that’s Cam.’ We were talking about edge; the edge, I’m an edge player. I don’t know who made that up and where it came from. You are a defensive end, you are a defensive tackle, we don’t need edge. Well, some guys like to be, so I talked about Aidan Hutchinson. At the end of the game last week, he was

playing over the center. So, he's playing up on his feet over the center. Well, if you've watched us enough defensively, you see Jonah Tavai up on his feet over the center. Last week or three weeks ago, he lines up on the slot receiver in the boundary and goes from there, blitz from there. That's really an edge, right? My point is when we recruit these guys, we recruit them to play multiple positions and do multiple things. That's what Jonah was able to do."

### **Head Women's Basketball Coach Stacie Terry-Hutson:**

#### **Opening Statement:**

"Yeah, we're happy to be 9-2, excited about what we've been able to do on the floor and the product we've been able to put out. We're going to have a tough challenge ahead of us after finals. We're heading to Florida to play Miami of Ohio, and Georgia which will be two good tests for us going into the Christmas break. I'm excited about where we are, and happy with the defensive effort we've been able to put out on the floor, and our offense is coming along each week. Great group of kids, young women, that I get the opportunity to work with and they really bought into what we're trying to do this year, so I'm happy for them to have some success."

#### **On the 9-2 start to the season:**

"You know, there's a science to scheduling. And we wanted to make sure that we put ourselves in a great situation to be where we are right now. So really not a lot of surprises. I mean, we knew what we were going to get when we went to Stanford. That was going to be a tough one, but a good challenge, a good measuring stick to see where we see where we are. But we're playing really competitive teams. And just, you know, we wish we can make up that San Francisco game to be honest. We were pretty evenly battled, and they out toughed us. But no surprises where we are just excited to, you know, test us on the road. There'll be a neutral site, but it'll be a good challenge, Georgia and Miami of Ohio."

#### **On what improvements the team has made to start this season compared to other seasons:**

"We made a big emphasis on improving on the defensive side of the ball. We've had some scorers on our teams, and with the recruiting that we've been able to do in the portal we added a lot of toughness to our roster. So, the defensive piece has really been the focus and they bought into that and it's interesting when she (Mercedes Staples) came to us from Minnesota, I don't think she was known as a defender. But we've turned her into our defensive stopper. Mercedes has the responsibility of guarding the best guard on the floor. So she's really bought in. I think she surprises herself. Sometimes we joke about it, but they understand that you got to win, got to defend, to win, I should say. That's been the biggest change."

#### **On how they approach the transfer portal:**

"I don't know that it was different this year. My assistant coaches had relationships; prior relationships that helped us get some of the kids in the portal. We've taken a page out

of coach Fisher and Dutcher's book. I mean, transfers have really helped their program and we've done the same with ours and the experience, being older having that power five experience with the kids that we got this year, and also the COVID years helped us I mean, they're just a year older, more mature and understand more about what we're trying to do"

**On the team's chemistry:**

"The chemistry is different. I mean, we did a lot in the beginning of the year to help blend this family because we had so many newcomers. But again, they really bought in just because they want to win. I mean these kids have had opportunities, I mean Abby Prohaska has played in a national championship game. I mean, there's different levels of experience, but they're all sacrificing their individual game to win. So, we got the right people sitting on the right seats on the bus, and that's really made a difference."

**Senior Guard Mercedes Staples**

**On why she chose to come to San Diego State:**

"Honestly, the coaching staff I had a great relationship with them right off the bat. Honestly, I was just grateful for the opportunity. I didn't know who's going to pick me up or who was going to recruit me and as soon as I talked to Stacie, it kind of felt like there was a sense of homeness, in a way. But as soon as I stepped foot on here, I told my parents I was like, I'm going here, and I have no idea why and I hadn't even met the team yet, to be honest. But there's just a sense of community here, which is very nice. And everyone's very, very welcoming. Like I've met so many people here and they all want to help you be successful. So, it's kind of nice to be around that type of environment."

**On some of the tactical differences she's seen this season:**

"Positivity goes a long way on a team. The seasons are really, really long and it can get really drowning. And right now, I think this is the most positive team you've ever had. Since I've been here to be quite honest with you. And that comes along with the experience that coach is talking about. When you're a lot older, you're a lot more mature. Having that maturity, you understand your role. We talked about roles a lot and she's very open about what your role is on the team. I'll give myself as an example she'll be like you're not the best passer, and I know that I'm not the greatest passer, but my role she says is t' guard the best defender and score for us, and that's my role So I mean, all of us having our roles and knowing our roles, we are able to be more successful."

**Head Men's Basketball Coach Brian Dutcher:**

**Opening Statement:**

"Well, one game left in the preseason. I liked the progress we made from St. Mary's to Kennesaw even though it was a one-day prep. So much of the game is mental, so that

was a hard loss against St. Mary's in Phoenix. We bounced back and we went hard at practice the next day, cleaned up some things and as much as you learn from winning, you learn a lot more from losing, unfortunately. So sometimes the lessons are harsher. I thought our response was good against Kennesaw, we came out and we wanted to see a better defensive effort I think we did. Offensively they're a smaller opponent. It remains to be seen, when we play bigger teams again, if we're able to take advantage of plays that we draw off and things we tried to do. But it was a step forward. Someone told me we played the ninth toughest schedule in the country so far, and sitting at eight and three, you want to be undefeated. But here we sit eight and three with a week to get ready for UCSD, trying to improve our team and move forward in the Mountain West. So, we're happy where we're at, obviously, there's higher levels to climb to and hopefully we will do that."

**On top three things to work on:**

"I think to get the new guys better defensively and to get the older guys playing up to our standard. Darrion, Micah, and Jaedon and even though he's been in the program, he hasn't been in game minutes. All the new guys and the freshmen have to play at a higher level, defensively based so when we run into games like St. Mary's, we're scoring as an issue with the win with our defense. We didn't do that; we didn't win with our defense against St. Mary's. We have to get the new guys better defensively. Offensively, I have to find ways to get Matt Bradley in dangerous positions because he's such a good passer and he always draws defensive attention. He's probably the best playmaker that we have, so I have to find a way to put him in more dangerous offensive positions where they're concentrated out and that he finds open shooters. He's a guy capable of getting guys three-point shots and five of the rolling balls. So, I had to find ways to put Matt in more dangerous situations. I think the last thing offensively is to try to free Jaedon LeDee up a little bit. He was better at St. Mary's with eight rebounds last night. I think he was close to a double double if he didn't have a double double. He played better and so I got to try to free him up as he gets used to playing again after sitting out a year."

**On being a levelheaded coach:**

"Yeah, you just have to be consistent, you can't be the happy coach when you're winning and super depressed and mad when you're losing you have to try to keep up even keel about you. Every day is just another workday and so maybe your tone changes to a degree or two. But you have to be consistent, and I think I've got coaches, some of them, coach harder, some of them coach with the arm around them. I just have a really good coaching staff that I kind of oversee and I let them be themselves and they do a good job working with his team and getting it ready to play."

**On young players learning:**

"Yeah, if they're about the right things, I just tell them you have to hold yourself accountable. I think I'm good at holding myself accountable. You're accountable for yourself first and foremost. Part of being accountable is learning from your mistakes, not only as a head coach but as a player and holding yourself accountable. If you do that we'll get better."

**On making threes:**

“Obviously, it’s mechanics and repetition. I mean you have to get in the gym, you have to have a sound stroke in order to make it, but at the end of the day it’s confidence. If you have a good jump shot, and it’s not going, yeah that can affect your confidence and confidence is everything. I don’t try to micromanage shots, sometimes if a guy would be wide open and he doesn’t want to take it and I make them take it he doesn’t think he’s going in before he even shoots it. That’s why sometimes you look up in Keshad is shooting three and his percentage is low. Well, if he thinks it’s going in, I don’t think he’s going to go out there to miss seven of them. But I don’t mind him taking the first one if it goes in, maybe he might make two, but I think realizes if he misses one then the second time he gets it, he’s going to try to drive. Sometimes you have to trust your players. If they suffer with confidence, I don’t want him throwing it up there. They believe it’s going in that I’m good with them taking it.”

**On the crowd at home games:**

“It’s unbelievable. They show up every game. They’re enthusiastic. They are supportive. They don’t get down on us at hard moments to get behind us. This is as good a crowd as you’re going to find in the country, and we have it right here in San Diego. Right in San Diego State. We’re very fortunate and we don’t take it for granted. We want to play hard for them, and I think they appreciate it more than anything. If they feel you’re playing hard, they’ll accept mistakes and if we’re on the floor and we’re playing as hard as we can play then our fans will always support us.”

**On Mountain West teams:**

“Unbelievable that we still have three undefeated teams. UNLV, I think Utah State is still undefeated and New Mexico are all playing really good basketball. You look at, I think bracketology came out again, and it’s just fun. I mean, we’re nine to 10 games in the season, they had four Mountain West teams that we had last year. I think what that does more than anything really is now when we get to conference, we have resume games in the conference. The more good teams we have there are no bad losses out there. Then if you can pick off an undefeated team, then it’s going to build your resume. The conference has done a good job winning enough games. We’re seven to nine teams deep in this conference right now and if that stays that way, then there won’t be a lot of bad losses out there to have, there’ll be only good wins.”

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