



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

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Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"Welcome everybody. Our first day in Viejas. We've been going since the summer obviously, four-hour work week on the court, fall semester started with a four-hour work week and then Monday went to a 20-hour work week on the floor. We're making good progress. I like this year's team. You never know what you're going to be until you're hitting them out. We've got a long way until we're hitting them out. We're going to try to get better every day. I like our pieces. We're a little beat up right now but it's early. We have two or three scholarship kids that aren't practicing for various reasons. We should have them all back by the start of the season. I'm excited to get this year's Aztec basketball team on the floor and see what can be done."

On what goes through his head when he thinks that this team was in the national title game last year:

"Yeah, it's fun. We're still basking in that obviously. We're not naive enough to know that we have to go back to work. We can only bask in that for so long. We're working positions and they know that. I don't feel as if they're taking any shortcuts because of the success they've had. We want to be successful because we work hard, and this group is working extremely hard."

On the impact of last year's season to recruiting:

"Our recruiting is so specific. High school kids, we're usually recruiting in the West. We've continued to do that. We've always had interest from anybody in the west. Nationally, that's usually the transfer portal where we can go anywhere in the country for a transfer. But in high school recruiting, it's been about the same as in college. Obviously, we've got good players who want to play for a national championship. We continue to recruit good players who are good people. That has helped with our success."

On the loss of Nathan Mensah:

"Yeah, that's a concern losing Nathan. Nathan was basically a five-year starter and his ability to block shots and protect the rim covered up for a lot of mistakes. We've got some guys capable of doing that, but maybe not at Nathan's level. We have to find other ways to be disruptive, to impact the ball. We need to take more charges and do a better job of keeping our man in front of us. We've always been good defensively. That's a trademark of this program and we will not let that slip."

On any difference that Aztec fans will see with the team this year:

"Every year, we want to shoot the ball better and I think this team is capable of shooting the ball better. Now we'll see how it gets into the games, how we shoot it, but I think we will be a better shooting team. We may play differently. If you've watched

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Aztec basketball over the years, there'll be years where we'd have four guys out there who couldn't shoot at all but were good guards. There'll be years we'd have four guards out there and one big. We have the ability to play a lot of different ways, including a four-guard lineup if we so choose. We're still trying to figure that all out. Like I said, sometimes that just takes time to see how well they actually play together, and we haven't had a full scrimmage yet. We scrimmage in every practice, but not a 20-minute half yet because of the injuries. So hopefully when we start scrimmaging for longer periods of time, we'll have a better indication of what we're going to be."

On if this season is harder or easier motivationally for the team after last season:

"Yeah, it's hard. What we did last year was really hard to do. No better example than not one of the top three seeds made the Final Four and those are the teams who are supposed to do well. But no matter how your season goes, if you keep at the right time to play your best basketball at the end of the year, anything's possible. Obviously, we want a level of consistency as we do that. Think about Aztec basketball, I think we have all seen over the years that we get better as the season goes on. No matter how well we're playing, we always feel there's another level we can play to."

On what has changed for the team since the title game:

"We got better gear. When we went to the Final Four, they sent us a lot of really nice stuff. So that may be the motivator, 'Oh I could use a new sweatsuit.' If we win enough, we're going to get really good gear. I know that Jordan will take good care of us."

On the newcomers:

"The freshman, Miles Heide, from the Seattle area has done a nice job. BJ [Davis], from Modesto Christian, is quick, athletic and a dynamic scorer. We're excited for both of those freshmen. Jay Pal, our transfer from Campbell, has had a high ankle sprain. Early in workouts, he looked really good but he's missed about eight or nine days, so we want to make sure he's healed up before he gets back out there. But he brings what you can't get a lot and that's experience. He'll be a fifth-year senior. Sometimes that experience is important. Reese [Waters] is from USC. He's met my expectations. He's going to be a dynamic scorer. Continues to work hard but Reese is a very good player. We're excited about all of those new pieces."

On Aguek Arop as the director of player development:

"My problem with AG [Aguek Arop] is I'm going to see him on the bench and try to put him in. They're going to look at me and say he doesn't get six. I'd like to put him in the game, but he brings a wealth of experience. He's a positive attitude guy. He knows how we do things in this program, so he won't be afraid to speak his mind to the coaches or the players. He is a great addition. We're happy to have him on staff."

On Jaedon LeDee:

"Jaedon [LeDee] is a dynamic scorer and so I have to make sure I get him the ball. I had a meeting yesterday. If I don't get him the ball, he's going to come get it himself. I'd like to get it to him when the spacings are right. But he's an attacking offensive player. He's going to be a dangerous guy for other teams to guard. Like all great players, he's got to score but he can also move the ball to get an assist because he's a good passer too. That was the thing when we had Jalen McDaniels, we moved him into the scoring role and I don't think we even realized at first how many double teams he was going to get when you run a lot of plays for a guy. Jaedon has to be the same way, he has to know we're going to run plays for him but when he draws the second defender, he has to be our best playmaker."

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On the lesson or take away from the tournament:

"I just think that we always felt our greatest opponent was ourselves. We knew we had enough talent to win. We just had to play to our standards. We have to play to that standard every day in practice, you can't take a day off. You have to strive to be great. That's not just in games but in every practice. If we do that, we'll have a good year."

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