



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS
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SDSU Baseball Head Coach Mark Martinez

Opening Statement:

"We're coming off a very bad year last year. We haven't experienced too many of those since I've been here. But the one thing I can tell you is, we were probably one of the youngest programs in the country last year. And if failure breeds success, then I'm hoping we should be pretty good. We experienced a lot of failure last year, but at back end of our season, we started to grow up a little bit. We played better baseball; we won some series, swept a series on the road at New Mexico. Our pitching staff performed exceptionally well all year long. We led the conference in just about every category, so that was great. We return the bulk of our pitching staff, so we're excited about this year. We're tired of playing against ourselves. We're very young. At our last intrasquad (game) yesterday, we played four innings because that's about the attention span that we had. We're kind of ready to go play somebody else. I feel good where we're at right now. We have some really good returners, and we're looking forward to open up at (Arizona State)."

On his scheduling philosophy:

"Before COVID hit, we were trying to go somewhere challenging every year. Whether it was to open the season or one of our off weekends, we wanted to go somewhere with a regional-type atmosphere. I think we started that really in the 2017 season trying to go to tougher places to play. In 2020, we went to Coastal Carolina; we went to Oklahoma — on purpose — because we felt like our program at that point was starting to show that we can play at a regional level, and we still have that same ideal here (today). We want to play in a regional atmosphere and kind of prepare us for postseason as well. So that's what goes into it. Going over to ASU is a great challenge. They have a storied program, a great venue to play baseball, and the fans are interesting. So it'll be a fun atmosphere for us to open (the season) and play someone else. We're looking forward to it."

On where things went downhill last year:

"Coming off the 2021 season, we were pretty old. Our pitching staff was really young at that time, and I think we got fooled a little bit by the fact that those older guys were playing the bulk of the innings and some of the younger guys, like a Tino Bethancourt, didn't play at all. So he was forced into action (last season) and there was kind of a hangover from not playing in 2021. Some of those guys that didn't get those experiences, touch points, during that season, were forced into service last year. And also, quite honestly, I take full responsibility. We just didn't do a good job preparing our guys for last year. So we rebooted the program this fall and summer and early part of the spring and we demanded a little bit more. We hold our guys accountable and we're looking forward to playing this season."

On how they put last season behind them:

"We haven't put it behind us. I want our guys to remember losing 38 games; we remind them all the time. I think that's one of those things that there should be a little bit of a sour taste in your mouth and play with a little bit chip on your shoulder because we performed poorly, and we coached that. Everything was bad last year, so we do remind them — a lot. We don't forget about it. We want to remember that because we don't want to experience that again."

On two-way players like TJ Fontain:

"We've had a lot of two-way guys in our program, but maybe not at his level. I think he's a viable professional prospect on both ends. You know, we've had guys like Alan Trejo, who's in the big leagues with the Rockies. He closed for us one year, but he wasn't going to pitch in the big leagues. But (he was) a guy that showed during his tenure here that he can perform at a high level. It's also been a process. (TJ) didn't hit a ton his freshman year, and he pitched very little, so it's been a process to get to this point. But he's a joy to coach, and he's

managed it very well. That's a hard thing to do, juggling two positions like that at a high level. On the mound, he's progressed into probably one of the better Friday guys around. Offensively, and you might not think this is true, but he's displayed probably the most raw power I've ever coached in my career. If you come watch batting practice, it's pretty crazy. The (nearby SDSU) police station does not like it when he hits."

On the recipe of pitching success:

"The biggest thing that we've always talked about is you have to build your pitching staff really from the back forward. You want to shorten games, and I think we've done that with the group that we have. We have Kelena Sauer, who's a dynamic right-hander, and Robert Brodell. Those guys (throw) in the mid-90s, Eldridge Armstrong, all those guys. All three of those guys are experienced guys that can pitch back-to-back days or twice during the weekend. What we've done is shorten the game, and that's kind of what we want. We want people in the other dugout to think, oh well, we're only playing eight today because you don't want to get to Sauer. Well, when you add a couple more guys that are pretty darn good, it really shortens the game and bodes well for us. We feel really good about the back end of our bullpen with some experienced guys that have some fuel."

On the team's top returning position players:

"We'll start in center field. Cole Carrigg is one of the top prospects in the country. Currently, he's a switch hitter and he's probably one of the best athletes in the draft. He's the kind of a guy that you build with from the middle of the field, starting with the pitching staff and (then) you add a dynamic center fielder. We're missing Irvin Weems right now on the field with an injury. He was (Mountain West) freshman player of the year for us last year in center field, so we can plug Cole in there. When Irv returns, you have two of the best outfielders probably in the country, which bodes well for us. Another big prospect is Poncho Ruiz, he's our returning catcher. He's caught a lot his first two years. Caden Miller is at second base and has been a joy to coach. Seems like he's 30 years old, but he's another switch hitter that can play at the top lineup. He's kind of anchored second base for us and since his freshman year, he's a calming influence in our program for sure. Then you add a kid like Xavier Gonzalez, a transfer from Southwestern Junior College who's dynamic fielder, so (we're) pretty strong in the middle. So with some returners plus you add a guy, that's pretty good. Tino Bethancourt will probably anchor first base for us. He's another returner, mentioned him earlier. Shaun Montoya in the outfield, Charlie Rhee in the outfield, Tyler Glowacki, a lot of options to play the corners. At third base, a couple of freshmen will split time there in Drew Giannini and Cade Martinez."

On the biggest question mark of the season:

"Offense. I think after a bad year last year, we have to get out of the gate offensively for sure. I think we do have a little more thump in the lineup, but we're not a power program by any means. I think traffic is going to be moved a little differently than it was last year. We can get balls into the gap this year, whereas last year it was a lot of singles. We just couldn't move traffic."

On how the Mountain West stacks up this season:

"San José State is going to be probably one of the best teams in the conference. They're returning just about everybody. They're old, a lot of seniors and graduate students are in that program, so they're going to have the experience factor for sure. They're going to be a test for us. UNLV is going to be very good. Fresno State, we don't know yet because they lost some guys. For me, San José State, you got to circle them because they're returning a lot of guys that performed very well last year."

On Cole Carrigg playing in the Cape Cod League over the summer:

"It's huge. It's one of the reasons that he's one of the top prospects in the country. He hit over .300 in the Cape League and that's hard to do. He was one of the top hitters there. The experience he had this summer is obviously a very selfish deal for him personally. But it also brings a dynamic player into our program with some really good experience to help lead our program as well. So he definitely benefited. Poncho (Ruiz) played there last year as well in Cape Cod League, so to have those two that have had that really great experience really helps our program for sure."

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