



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"We've been on the road eight out of 10 days. So, we got back they got to sleep in their own beds. And we gave him a day off Sunday. We met yesterday and we knew we were going to go long on the floor, maybe an hour, just get their bodies moving again. But when we met, they still look tired. And it's a long season. And so as much as we're all excited to play, and they're excited as anybody, there's a recovery period that goes on. So, we got through recovery yesterday, did enough on the floor to start working toward a game plan and go harder today. And then really hard tomorrow and then light again leading into the game. So, we're still debating how we want to do things against Alabama, who we want who will be guarding their best players. And that will change over the course of a game but every time you watch film, you learn something new. They're well coached. Everyone talks about their offense, but metrically they're better defensively than we are. So obviously that's why they're the top seed in the tournament. They play both ends of the floor. They play hard. They're talented, and it'll be a challenge. But when we're looking forward to on Friday."

On what the team will look like on Friday:

"I mean, as much as you watch on tape and you see things strategically you think you can do, then you step on the floor, and you see how long they really are. We've done that enough as coaches, as much as we scheme, and we think this will work. Sometimes length is really important. It's been important to us. We're longer than most of the teams we play. We won't be longer than this team. Contesting a shot will be harder, bigger players shooting over smaller players, that's basketball, and that's why teams win championships, but we'll have toughness and grit will contest every shot they take. Like I said from the start of the year, as long as we're playing at our best then I like our chances."

On how physical the game will be:

"Yeah, it all depends on how much the media had an effect on the officials after the Tennessee game. I mean, I wouldn't want to be Tennessee the next game, they'll probably call every single foul, but we'll see if they felt the first round was too physical and they've discussed it with the officials, I have no idea. The officiating is really good at this level. Only the best guys are calling the games. But with that being said you have to adjust to officiate, we'll see how it's being called and make whatever other adjustments are necessary."

On if this run makes up for the canceled 2020 tournament potential run

"No, we're always going to be disappointed, and for the kids more than anybody. Like I said, all those years ago is good as Malachi Flynn and KJ Feagin and Yanni Wetzell were they never played in the NCAA Tournament one time in their careers. That's unbelievable. And so sometimes we take for granted just going and losing the first round, just to have a chance to play

in it would have meant the world to those guys, so I feel bad about that. That they never got to taste March Madness in their careers."

On getting to play with a deeper bench and how he learned to manage that:

"Usually, they determine who plays and doesn't play. You know, there's not a coach alive who is not going to play a productive lineup. So sometimes you play a lot of guys early in the year, and some guys perform so much better that you start cutting your numbers down and cutting them way down in important games. But right now, there are games where our bench is better than our starting lineup, and sometimes we play better with our bench in the game. So, it all depends on who's playing well on what particular night is who we go with. That's been our strength all year as our depth and so hopefully that will continue to pay dividends when we play Friday night against Alabama."

On the situation surrounding the Alabama men's basketball team off the court, and the potential distraction that may cause:

"Well, it hasn't obviously happened at Alabama. They've played at a high level, you know, winning the SEC, you know, winning in March so they're playing good basketball. So, they're playing good basketball and we're playing a good basketball. So, I'm excited to see what it looks like Friday night on when we see them in Louisville."

On how the Maui Invitational might prepare them for this moment:

"Yeah, I mean, everything makes you better. Obviously, you make bigger adjustment after losses than wins. And we're good because we don't accept even bad play winning. If we're winning with bad play, that's not acceptable. But when you lose, it always has a greater effect. To try to find out why exactly you lost the game. Yeah, so losing family wasn't fun. But I think we grew from that and we're better because of it."

On why Darrion and Adam are more effective on the perimeter:

"Yeah, Adam is more of a catch and shoot player, while Darrion has the ball more because he's a point guard, and he's playing off more ball screens. So, he might shoot if a guy ducks under a ball screen raise up and shoot it in. Whereas Adam finds it off a post touch they kick it out to him, or we run a special play for him that we wouldn't run for Darrion where we tried to disguise a screen, where he then he comes off another screen and gets a shot. He's more of a catch and shoot player. So, we need them. We need them both to make threes. If we're going to advance in the tournament, we have to make some threes. So, whether that's those two or Micah or Lamont or Matt, we have to make some threes in order to advance. Their opponents only shoot I think to 29% for three, and our opponents on issue 26% from three. So, it's not going to be easy. We're going to have to find out how those are going to come we have some ideas of how to get some and we'll see if it works."

On the kind of team that can beat Alabama:

"I mean we play that way anyway. So, we're not going to have to adjust our style in order to play that way. You know, a lot of times we have two low posts around the basket that's helped our rebounding, it's helped our offense become more efficient. So, we're used to play more physical, so hopefully that matches up well against them."

On Alabama's Brandon Miller:

"I mean, if he's rolling, there's not a lot you can do other than doubling. You know, when I watched the Gonzaga game today, and when he got going, they doubled him on balls screen they doubled him on catches and it's like Steph Curry or any of these guys in the NBA, and they get going and you just have to run double them. So, we'll have that available to us if we need to. Now whether we start that way or whether we have to do it at some point in the game, we will have an ability to do that if we need to."

On having the first shootaround and media session on Thursday:

"If we can get out on time. I think we'll be fine. You know, but we can't be scheduled to leave at one and then leave it for and get to the hotel at midnight and be eating at two in the morning. Then that'll make it really hard. So even on me when I was like I said everyone knows I was eating chicken wings at two in the morning. So I wasn't at my best the next day but I was close enough.

On what it meant for him personally to get his first NCAA Tournament win as a head coach:

"Not a lot. I mean, at some level, that's what they pay me to do is to win basketball games. So, to me, I'm not trying to be overly emotional about winning in that, I've always been wired that way. That's what they pay us to do is coach the team, get the best out of the team, and we're supposed to win, and we're supposed to win in March. We can't tell everybody we recruit that we want to win a Final Four or win a national championship and then act like we're super overly excited when we do win. So it's just how I'm wired. I'm more happy for the kids. You know, I've been to a number of them, and I don't take anything for granted. But I like the guys that go for the first time, that came here to win games, and then now they're winning games. First time experiences are always great for me to watch on the team and my coaches and that sort of thing.

On embracing the underdog role:

"I don't think we'll play off that or play up to that that we're underdogs. We just say that if we're the best version of us, we'll have a chance to win. So I always say our number one opponent is ourselves play up to our standard if we do that, then we should have a chance to win the game."

San Diego State Senior Guard Adam Seiko

On the feeling of the roster as they reflect on this whole season:

"Yeah, our mantra all season has been to stay connected. With the transfers that we got this year in Micah, Darrion, I know Jaedon sitting down last year to see the growth, from them, from August, all the way until the point of winning the regular season title and the conference championship. It's been a blessing, we're more connected than ever right now. Our depth is really, really crucial to our success. So, we're ready and we're happy to be in the sweet 16."

On if this team is wired differently than previous teams:

"Yeah, and that's something we talked about in the locker room as well. Each guy one through nine has led the team in scoring or a stat, in an individual game throughout the year. So that just goes to show that anybody can step up at any given moment. Everyone plays their role. But when someone is down or hurt or a game is not going well for somebody else, somebody else will step up. And that's a great thing about our team."

On how much of a differentiator it is when him and Darrion are hitting threes:

"Yeah, when we're shooting the ball well, we're a different team. Especially when Darrion is hitting shots. I'm hitting shots, these past few games past few weeks they've been really sticky on me, not really giving me any open looks. So, I've been trying to find ways to be aggressive in other areas of the floor. But when we're hitting shots, we're a different team, we can take from beating a team to a 10-point lead to 20 with us hitting shots. So, we've been in the gym this week. I'm ready for this upcoming game and hopefully being able to get some more looks on the floor and see where I get to my spots."

On if making the sweet 16 has made up for the disappointment of 2020:

"Yeah, I'm for sure using it as motivation for myself and me, Keshad, AG, Nate, Jared Barnett are the only people that were a part of that team and for that to go down how it did was very disappointing and flashback three years later, we're making a run in the tournament at the sweet 16. So, we're not complacent. We want to keep making a run hopefully to the Final Four. But that is definitely in the back of our heads."

On how nice it is to have a chance for some of the guys on that 2020 team:

"It's a blessing. It's really a blessing. It's a testimony to the winning culture here at San Diego State that we were able to make the tournament the past few seasons after that and we lost in the first round. But this year we figured out ways to be better, especially down the stretch. So those guys AG, Nate, the twins, Jared, we're all happy to be here and make a run for this team."

On if being able to play the first two games allows for them to hit the ground running:

"Yeah, it was always a thought of ours that once you win a game in the tournament, once you go 1-0 there's momentum from there. Everyone had us there in the first game as you can see, a bunch of big teams have been losing to other teams. So, after we got the Charleston game, they played very hard, you know, they talked a lot. They're a really good, well coached team so getting that win and going into Furman and we were very confident about playing one game at a time but making it a run in this tournament."

On how having a big frontline changes things around the post:

"Yeah, I mean, our shooting and our post work complement each other all season long. I mean, in the beginning of the year, we're trying to figure out ways to get the ball to our bigs more. We knew that we were going to be a really good offensive rebounding team and over the course of the year it took us a lot of games to get better at that. But with our outside shooting, when we're shooting well even if we're not shooting well, they're still sticky to me to Darrion and not letting us get the looks that we usually get. But we've been able to put the duck in which is something that we've been working on all season to our bigs, Jaedon, Nate, and AG who have been phenomenal in the post over the past few months. So, we're going to like to keep going inside and hopefully our shots will continue to fall."

On his expectations of Alabama:

"Yeah, they're a big physical team. Top five defense in the country. They get out of transition a lot. They're fast. Obviously, they have Brandon Miller, who's one of the top players in the country, and they have good players all around. Their starting five is really good, Jahvon Quinerly, so we're going to have to keep them off the boards as well. Bediako is big inside. He blocks a lot of shots at the rim. So, we're going to be able to get to a lot of mid-range pull ups off pin downs and our dribble action, but they're a physical team. So, we're going to have to match their physicality. And that's what we're preparing for in practice right now. So, we'll be ready."

On if the officials will impact this game with calling fouls:

"You never really know. In the Mountain West, it feels like the physicality you're not allowed to play as physical as you want. But in the tournament, we've been watching Alabama's games like on film. It's been really aggressive like the refs aren't calling that many fouls on reach ins, on bumps. So, with us watching that film, we know that the refs aren't going to call it as easy. They're going to let you play aggressive so we can't go in there being soft and thinking we're going to get a call we're not I mean; this is the number one team in the country. So, the refs probably are not going to put the ball on our side as many times. So, we just match their physicality and we'll be alright."

On if they pay attention to the low amount of mid-range shots Alabama takes and how it changes their defense for three-point shooters:

"Yeah, we talked about that in film yesterday. That they don't take a lot of mid ranges. They love to shoot the three especially in transition one on one pull up threes. I mean, these guys are just going out there and hoop so it's going to really be a guard your yard game. Heavy gap game as well because when they drive, they want to score, they want to score so we'll be in the gaps game, trying to get them off balance a little bit in that contest with the high hand on every shot, but they definitely love to shoot the three type of glass."

On if they take the time to reflect as a team on being in the sweet 16:

"Yeah, this is a really special group, and this group is even deeper than the undefeated team we have. But the undefeated team has so many talented players. But this group of guys has been great. I mean at the beginning of the year, the summer, we knew that we had a chance to be a really, really good team. We've lost some games this year that we didn't feel like we should have where we didn't play too well. But, over the course of the season, we've been growing and growing every day, our mantra at practice has been to get 1% better every day and stay connected as well. So, the growth has been just phenomenal."

On how he balances not forcing a shot but also not hesitating:

"Yeah, so they're obviously guarding me super tight every time I came on the floor and the coaches yelling at the player guarding me don't let him touch you, don't let him do this and that. But as I was watching the film, there were a couple spots and catches that I could've got my shot off. They run on me super hard. So, I've been watching film with Coach Acker just figuring out, we actually just got to work out in before this, so just figuring out ways to get my shot off quicker. And my spots on the floor. But other than that, there's a lot of different things I bring to this team that I can help the team win with so if my shots are not falling, there's always different opportunities on the floor."

On what it's like to be in Louisville again for him and his family:

"It's surreal again, it's a surreal feeling. Just flashback a year later and say it happened so quick. We lost to them in the first round. Now we have a chance to potentially meet them in the elite eight. But for my family it's really been a blessing. They were traveling back and forth from Orlando to Denver to watch the first few rounds of those games. So just all glory to God that he helped Arthur win those games and us win those games and it almost feels like it's inevitable that we play each other again, but we got to focus on the Alabama game and just focus on getting a win."

On how much attention he has paid to all the stuff going on outside the Alabama basketball program:

"Yeah, for them I'm sure it's tough. But the way these guys have been playing after that situation is pretty incredible. I mean, as far as Brandon Miller, having his 40-point night with all the stuff that was coming out about him. On our side we're not really thinking about it or thinking like all this is affecting them. We just see it on the media and news outlets, but they're a good team regardless, they've played well after that situation. They're still in the top two throughout that situation, so we can't go in there thinking that they're, going to be soft or anything. They probably want it just as bad as we do."

On what he sees in Brandon Miller:

"Yeah, he's a hooper. He just plays free out there. He has a lot of energy. You can tell he talks a lot, but he's confident in his game. And so we're going to have to be in the gaps on him, contest at the rim with high hands and he's going to make tough shots. So we can't get our hands on that. He's going to make tough shots. He's been doing that all year. But the more we can get stops on him and hopefully give him a defense that he hasn't seen before. We're playing games and pressure and ball heavy. Hopefully we'll slow him down a little bit."

On drawing from his experience in international elimination games:

"Playing with the pros was a huge step for me in my career. I feel like I took a step forward as far as improving my game. Those games, international games, I can't even explain it, but it's a different feeling when you play for your country. But then coming back to San Diego State, I had a better vision of what it took to be a better leader, vocally, the coaches and the players helped me a lot to see different areas on the floor, different scenarios where I can be a good leader, more than anything. I was able to play free over there. But, these games, those games compared to the tournament, obviously, the tournaments a different feeling, like tournaments, something that every kid dreams about, especially making a run to the Sweet 16 like this. It feels great. But, like I said, we're not complacent. We want to keep winning."

On his experience being in the tournament:

"It's been great. I've been here a few times in the tournament already and losing in the first round. So, our main goal was just to focus on the first game, Charleston, go 1-0, and then from there, just take it on. But from the teammates, being with the teammates, experiencing everything off the court is always great. The families being with us on the plane, all the fans coming to the game supporting us. It's all just a blessing to see them out there with us and carry on this energy with us and going on to Kentucky and hopefully we get the same amount of love. I know it's going to be packed with Alabama fans over there. But I know our fans will show up as well."

San Diego State Senior Forward Aguek Arop

On what a difference maker it is when Darrion and Adam hit threes:

"I mean, you guys see it when we're hitting threes, we're pretty much unstoppable. I mean, we have the inside presence with me, Nate, Keshad and Jaedon. But when shots aren't falling, it does make the game a little grittier. But once Darrion and Adam are hitting threes, the game it looks a lot more fun. It's a lot more free, we gave them more opportunities downlow just opens everything up. And so, I mean, you guys watch. It's fun. It's fun to watch and it's even more fun to play."

On how the game plan changes in the paint

"Definitely have to be a lot smarter going into the paint. Our plan these past few games was inside so that's why we've been pounding it in but coming up to Alabama was going to be a lot more effort from inside out and so yeah, definitely change the dynamic in the aspect."

On if the team has played anyone with the size of Alabama:

"I can't think of right off the bat. But I remember Arizona was huge. I remember seeing them in Maui. That's the one that comes to mind. But I have to think about it a little longer, remember a team as big as them."

On if the team embraces the underdog role:

"Most certainly. Yeah, we'll pull up tweets, videos and everything that people are just talking down on us and they don't expect us to win and they're not believers. And so yeah, we embrace it for sure. Like, we are the underdogs. Even in games we were favored to win analytically, there's still people that doubt us and so we always pulled that up. Like to watch it."

On how exciting it is to play the number one team in the country:

"I mean, you couldn't ask for anything else as a competitor. Yeah, it's a perfect opportunity to go and show the world like who we are, what we're made of, and we can compete with the with the number one team."

On what he is most looking forward to:

"I'm most looking forward to just competing and showing who we are as a team and how connected we are to people that doubt us. And so, it's been just being able to go out there and show who we are and what we're made of. That's what I'm most looking forward to."

On if this is an unbelievable climax to a career to be able to finish like this:

"Yeah, I mean, I couldn't have asked for anything better, the Lord's really graced me with the strength and the perseverance to get through all that I've gone through and this year, it's really been a blessing. I came back for closure and to close it out right. Unlike last year, losing in the first round, losing in the conference tournament. And so yes, I couldn't have made it up. I'm going to give all glory to God and I'm just extremely, extremely grateful for this opportunity."

On how his career would have played out if he never crossed paths with Dutcher:

"I mean, I don't know what would have happened. Most coaches aren't willing to do what they did, what Brian Dutcher did for me with my injuries and letting me, pretty much giving me all the space that I want and if I choose to sit out and not play again. He's perfectly fine with that. So I can't say exactly what I'd be like without him, but I can say I'm extremely grateful for all that he's done. And for the intangibles I'd say he's a real calming presence. I don't know if you guys have noticed but he has a real calming presence. He's never too high, never too low and he knows how to speak to each individual player which is huge."

On if he feels equipped to go into a game like this:

"Oh, yeah, most certainly. I mean, size is something you can't teach. And so being able to have that, brings me to another aspect that's great to have, especially with playing against the number one team in the nation with how big they are, it gives us just that age to be able to just stick with them and just play with them."

On what the team does well that can help slow down their attack:

"I believe we do a good job both guarding the three and slowing down transition points and even protecting the paint. I give credit to our coaches who are great at scouting and knowing what needs to be taken away. Each game is different. They don't necessarily have the exact same game plan for each game. So it's a huge credit to our coaches and just my teammates and how they come out, ready to compete."

On if there is something in particular that he wants people to know about this team:

"Not necessarily. I mean, we've been showing these past few games. This is what we're made of and I think people are starting to notice and see that we're a great group of guys who are talented and connected."

On how bad he wants this win:

"I mean, this is what we all dream of. I can't imagine anyone else wants it more than me but I'm sure all the other players are thinking that and so it'll show come game time who will dive on the floor first, who is going to get the loose balls, who is the team that stays together once they hit adversity. That'll be the team who wants it more."

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