



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

GOAZTECS.COM | @GOAZTECS | #GOAZTECS

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"Welcome, everybody. It's an exciting time of the year. It's March, March Madness. We'll start in the conference tournament on Thursday, noon, play either Colorado State or Fresno State. So we'll spend time in practice over the next two or three days getting ready for both of them, which is an interesting thing to do. Then a week from today, we'll probably be on a plane heading to the NCAA tournament. So this is action packed as it gets from March, conference tournament on Thursday, NCAA Tournament starting next Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and so this is the best time of the year. If you're a basketball player, basketball culture, basketball fans."

On being comfortable in Vegas:

"It's nice because our fans travel. So, it always feels like we have the most fans in the building. So our Aztec fans are loyal. They're passionate, they make that drive. And especially if we get by the Thursday game, they're gonna be there in force on Friday and Saturday, so that's always the best part having our Aztec fans follow us. It gives us comfort on a road floor making it feel like a home game."

On the comfort level of knowing they don't have to win the tournament to still go to the NCAA tournament:

"You know me, I'm always nervous. I never think we're in the NCAA Tournament. So, knock on wood. This is one of the few years I feel like we've been in for over a week or so. You know, our metrics are good. We played a really hard schedule. We won a lot of important games. And I felt like we played our way in and then to win the regular season title by two games. Kind of gives you even more comfort. So we're going to go to Vegas in our conference tournament, let it all hang out and not have to worry about being in the NCAA tournament which is the ultimate prize to try to win in that event. And that's what our goal is."

On the depth of the team:

"Yeah, we're the deepest we've ever had. We go nine deep and we're healthy, which is a rarity in college sports. So we're healthy and we're deep and that should make for positive results in March and that's what we're hoping. We have guys that average 20 some minutes a game where a lot of these programs, guys are playing 32, 34, 36 minutes a game and that can wear on you over the course of a year. So especially in the three game and three day situation or an NCAA tournament, quick turnaround, that depth should hopefully pay dividends."

On what practice is like for preparing for multiple different teams:

"Yeah, there's a comfort in the conference tournament because we obviously played Colorado State twice and Fresno once. Colorado State obviously runs a Princeton offense which takes a lot more time to get ready for. Fresno has a lot more ball

screen post up situations so just experience and having done it for a lot of years. I feel as if we'll be ready for either opponent. But obviously, as a coaching staff, you'd like to know who you're playing a couple of days in advance to really concentrate."

On what about this year's team will lead to success in the postseason:

"Well, hopefully experience. Obviously we haven't won an NCAA Tournament game in my tenured year. But we've won a lot of Mountain West games. I think we played in the conference championship game, five straight years. So we've won important games in March but we haven't been able to get that NCAA first game first win to get some momentum. When I think back to my first year, we lost to Houston by two. We lost to Creighton in overtime so we've been close, but we haven't gotten over the hump. So hopefully everything we're doing to prepare for the conference tournament will then lead us into the NCAA tournament."

On thinking back to last season while reflecting on this year's goals and success:

"You know, last year I thought we had a really good year but when you look back and you're not hanging a banner at all, it's kind of disappointing even though you made the NCAA tournament. You want something to show for it. This year, hanging the regular season banner, hopefully we can get a conference from it. Hang another banner. You feel good about what you've done. And then you go for the ultimate prize which is trying to win on the biggest stage which is the NCAA tournament. So that's kind of the goal. All this prep we've done all year leads to this moment. And then I always say, players win games in March and that's not to dismiss coaching. We want to put them in a position to win. But that's why they have all these darlings in March, guys make important shots, the teams make important plays, and all of a sudden, you're off and running. So hopefully that's us this year."

On what the conference awards say about the collective focus on defense:

"Well not to try to put the media down, but the media put Lamont Butler which was the harder choice to make because most people look at stats and it's easy to put Nate if you look at his block shots. He was player of the year last year and he impacted the game this year. But Lamont Butler doesn't usually have to, as a guard, lead the conference in steals, some stat like that. But I think the media realizes that Lamont impacts the game whether it's against Wyoming Maldonado, shutting him down for the most part, guarding guys like Stevens from Colorado State, Omari Moore, the MVP from San Jose, Lamont always draws that assignment. And I think it's nice to know that not only his coaching staff here appreciates him, but the media appreciates him and the conference appreciates the effort he puts into his defense."

On making adjustments for late game situations:

"Yeah, it's everything. We work out press offense every day, because we know we're going to get pressed if we're ahead. And it cost us games, obviously. But you watch any game across the country. Everybody in the stands, everybody on TV, every analyst says don't throw it in the corner and you look up and 90% of the games, you throw it to that corner and someone's got to get it out of there. So, we're no different. We don't want to throw it there. But we're adults here. We've been working on making plays from there. Last shot of the game, like I said, I was a genius in New Mexico. I told Lamont to drive all the way and make a layup and he shot a three. So players make plays to win games and as much as we draw things up, sometimes they have to step beyond that and just take what the defense dictates and so we work on it. We work on situations today, need a three late, trying to stop a team from shooting a three, falling up three. Those are things we work on religiously, but you throw the crowd and throw the human element into all these situations, and anything can happen."

On who has made the biggest strides over the last two or three weeks:

"Well, Darrion's game against New Mexico was a big moment for him. He hit a couple shots early in Boise and I thought he was going to get on a roll. So, we need him to play well. We need him to shoot the ball better than he shot it during the season, shooting like he did in New Mexico and that makes us more dangerous. I think guys like Micah Parrish are playing a lot better

than they did early in the year. Jaedon LeDee, look at Jaedon, I mean, he sat here and looked like he was so anxious to make things happen. And it was almost going too fast. Now he's settled in, then he leads us in scoring in our last game. I think the interesting thing with our team is we've had so many different guys needing some scoring for different games and that makes us hard to guard but you can say take Matt Bradley away and then Jaedon LeDee or Micah Parrish or Adam Seiko step up and have huge games. So I think we're dangerous because we have a lot of guys who can score the ball."

On potentially facing Boise in the championship:

"Yeah, we had epic games in the last year, three one possession games, and then obviously losing in their place. We had a late lead that they overcame. So, last year I said, when we played them the first time, this is gonna be a prize fight because this could go three rounds. So, it could go three rounds again, we can see Boise again if both teams are fortunate enough to make it to the championship game."

San Diego State Junior Guard Lamont Butler

On who is the better defensive player, him or Nate:

"Who's the better one? That's a good question. I feel like I defend well. But Nate won it last year too so it's hard to compete with him. His presence is big, so I'll probably say Nate."

On what it means to be called conference defensive player of the year:

"It feels great. It feels great. It's one of the things I put emphasis on, I feel it's one of my best attributes that I bring to the team so every night going out and doing that. I used to have a coach and they harp on that a lot so I'm glad to be able to read through."

On if it feels different to go into Vegas knowing they're on solid ground with the NCAA tournament:

"It feels a little different. We're very confident, very confident. We feel like we can win everything. We can win this conference tournament; we can win March Madness. That is how we're going into that every day, with that mentality."

On if wanting to be Mountain West Defensive Player of the Year was motivation heading into the year:

"Yeah. I wanted to be that early in the year. Just one of the goals I put out for myself. I just tried to go every night, try to prove that to myself and everybody else."

On how hard it is to play defense at that level for an entire season:

"It's tough. There's a lot of good players out here in our conference, so every night is a challenge. But it's really just about hard determination. So, every night is giving them my all."

On if he has a preference of playing Colorado State or Fresno State:

"No, I don't have a preference. Whoever we play we want to win so pretty much we got to focus on ourselves. If we do that, we have a chance against anybody."

On how much the team is enjoying March basketball:

"Oh, yeah, everybody's talking about it. Yeah, it's March, it's March, it's time. So, we're very excited. Like I said, we have big aspirations this year. We want to make it all the way to the national championship and win it. So that's our goal."

On why he thinks the team can do big things:

"Well, everybody has confidence in each other. We trust each other and we know that the next guy is going to pick up on our mistakes. I just feel like we have a really good team this year, everybody does their part. Everybody does their job, and we're going to do it for everybody."

On better handling late game situations:

"I feel it's more doing the same thing. Just more concentration. It's March, so everybody is going to be more concentrated. I think that's gonna be everybody's mentality, but a lot of times in our games we've lost concentration at the end of the game, but we're going to clean it up. Like I said, it's March."

On wanting to get out of the first round:

"Yeah, for sure. We lost a couple times over the last couple of years. But we want to win every game so we don't want that to happen at all. It's a great motivational factor for us. I feel we're going to get it done this year."

On the team's success this year:

"It's everything. It's everything. When I came here, I always wanted to hang banners and get a ring here. It's a great opportunity for us to do that."

On the depth of the team and having fresh legs in March:

"Our depth is one of our attributes. I can play hard for 5, 10 minutes and then I know the next guy is gonna come in and do the same. So it's hard. It's hard for other teams too because they kind of get worn down throughout the game and we got fresh legs throughout."

San Diego State Senior Forward Nathan Mensah

On the mindset of playing in Vegas:

"As much as I've been here, Vegas has been a place where we've tried very hard. My freshman year we still tried very hard to go. But I think it's the preparation. As soon as we go there, we go there to win three games."

On who is the better defensive player, him or Lamont:

"Obviously this year, Lamont has proven to everyone that he can hold his own against any guard in the league and I think the media saw that as well. I'm thankful that the coaches gave me this award given my past experience as well as this year."

On how the team is preparing for multiple different teams:

"This year, we are taking the time to practice to make sure we are the best team out there in Vegas. And that's if we play either Fresno or Colorado State, we are not going to take anything for granted and make sure that we know what's at stake for us."

On how important it is to win the Mountain West championship:

"Anytime you step on the court, you play to win, so winning this conference tournament would be nice."

On if there is any pressure taken off by knowing they don't have to win the tournament to make the NCAA tournament:

"I think it's all about growth. I've seen growth among my teammates, starting with myself all the way to freshman. There's a level of growth. This tournament, we're going the distance to go more than one game at a time."

-SDSU-