

San Diego State University Basketball Media Conference

Tuesday, April 11, 2017

John David Wicker

Steve Fisher

Brian Dutcher

Press Conference

JOHN DAVID WICKER: Well good afternoon, and thank you for joining us today to celebrate the end of an era and tip-off yet another era. Steve Fisher is a legend in San Diego and NCAA basketball as a whole. As a head coach he has patrolled the sideline for 26 seasons, 18 of those on the Mesa, accumulated 570 victories, 22 post-season appearances, 15 NCAA appearances, 3 Final Fours, 2 National Coach of the Year and one NCAA title.

For every one of those accolades mentioned, Brian Dutcher has been on the bench playing a key role. Steve led SDSU basketball to unprecedented heights, conference championships, NCAA Tournament appearances, player and coaching accolades too numerous to detail. He helped turn Viejas Arena into the sporting center to be at in San Diego. The Jeff Jacobs JAM Center sits next door to us and is a testimony to the success of Steve and the teams that he's had. That building would not be here today without the success of Steve Fisher and the staff and teams he assembled over 18 years.

More importantly is the man. Friend, mentor, husband, father, grandfather.

He's been a teacher all of his life. Beginning at Rich East High in Park Forest, Illinois, through today at San Diego. He's mentored countless young men both players and coaches who have gone on to success in basketball but also success in life.

I'm fortunate to have had the opportunity to work with Steve for over five years. He's a great coach. He is a legend. But he's a better person. When my wife Rachel was pregnant with Scarlett, it never failed that the first thing Steve asked when he saw had he was how was Rachel doing, and it was genuine and sincere concern for me and my family.

He cares! You saw this in how he handled his players, coaches, support staff, and others throughout the department, the campus and the community.

While Steve will no longer be on the bench he is an Aztec for life. In keeping with that notion Steve will continue to play a role within the department and university as a whole that allows him to finance growing the connection between San Diego State and the greater community. I'm excited that he and Angie will have plenty of time to spend together as well as with Jay, Mark, Jill, and most importantly young Max. Steve Fisher.

STEVE FISHER: Thank you, J.D.

(Applause.)

Thank you, J.D. I'm going to start by dispelling any thoughts -- I know rumors run rampant, and I got my health, my mind has always been questioned but I have my health! (Chuckles.) And this was done and those who I have worked with, starting with Dutch, but every coach that we have hired, every player that we've had, they know that I'm pretty meticulous and sometimes they say I take forever to make a decision.

What Angie and I have done over the course of our last three or four years, and I've said this, and it's not been phoney, it's been a fact that we're going to take time, decompress, take a deep breath, go to Florida, sit on the porch, and together make a decision.

This year, we made the decision. We made the decision before we went to Florida. We are going, we are going to go now in May, because there is still a lot on my plate that I will be doing. It was done for all the right reasons. I know that the program is in great, great hands with Brian Dutcher and it will flower rich. So that makes me feel good.

What I want to do now, a little bit, and Angie is not here and Mark is not here and Mark said I don't want to let 'em see me cry twice. If there are any tears they should be tears of joy because very few times do people in any walk of life have the privilege to go out on their terms, feeling good about themselves and the vast majority of those that they have worked with and for feeling the same way.

I do know that that's the sentiment. I'm going to have some role. I'm not exactly sure and I don't think J.D. or President Hirschman or our next president know exactly what it will be, but I'm not all of the sudden going to disappear from the landscape. I'm not going to be in the way but I'm going to be a part of San Diego State and that's important to me. I want to be here. There is something to be said for wanting to be where you're wanted and I feel that.

I'm going to take probably too much time for most of you, but I'm going to jump from chapter to chapter about my own journey. I've talked to our players and I appreciate the fact that sometimes we talk about having forced fun. I asked them to be here. We won't take roll and find out who is not here but I appreciate the fact that we've got the vast majority of our team and our coaches who are here today to be a part of what truly is a celebration of where we've come from, where we are and where we can close our eyes and say we're going to.

What we do is more than coach basketball. We're teachers. That's what I've always aspired to be. My dad was my first coach, he and my junior high coach shaped and allowed me to say, this is what I want to do. Way, way back when I was 15 years old, I knew that I was going to be a teacher and a coach.

My high school yearbook, you know what they have, nickname? "Fish" "likes psychology and trig, dislikes getting up in the morning, plans to be teacher/coach" if you go to the yearbook for her ran high school in 1963 that's what it will say. So I knew what I wanted to do. I'm doing what my dad wanted to do. World War II, four kids, a house and a mortgage prevented him from doing what I have the privilege to do and I know it's a privilege to do it.

How you get where you wind up, it's sometimes not planned. All of us close our eyes and dream and we dream about a perfect road that will get us from point A to where we want to end up. It doesn't work that way. There are twists and turns and things that happen along that journey that get you there or get you where you're going to wind up for a whole variety of reasons.

We have a group of players here that all have hopes and dreams and aspirations. For some of us that are a little older we can remember back when we said this is what I aspire to do. We have that with our program, with our team. We've said, close your eyes and dream. Dream big! Then help turn dreams into reality.

We've also talked to them about enjoy the journey. So often we get caught up in where we want to go and wind

up that we forget to take time to take a deep breath and enjoy the process and the journey. I will say that again to our players, enjoy the journey. Don't get ahead of yourself. Don't get too caught up in where you want to go. You've seen it in your own line of work. I've seen it in young coaches. They're so in a hurry to go from a young graduate to an assistant coach to head coach to their first head job to the first high major head job without taking time to enjoy where they are at the time.

I've been lucky enough to travel to a whole lot of different avenues to get where I wound up. I started as a coach at Rich East High School, southern part of Cook County I'm a southern Illinois guy. I never thought I would go further than Bloomington Normal, where I went to college. I was planning on going to Belleville, Illinois, very close to St. Louis. That was my comfort zone. All of them spoke like I did with a bit of a southern draw, like J.D. does. I had befriended a guy when I was in college, Les Whitley who called me up and said I just took the job at Rich East, you're going with me. I went with him. I trusted him. We were together three years, I became the head coach I was 11 years a high school coach never, ever thinking that I would leave, never wanting to leave.

I never had a resume until I got hired. I didn't have a resume. In my day graduating from college, they went on campus and they hired teachers. So I didn't have a resume. In 1979, March of '79, young Mark Fisher was born in November of '78, we bought our first home, my rut is getting deeper and deeper at Rich East, I don't want to go anywhere. The same guy, Les Whitley says "pack your bags, we're going to western Michigan" I had no desire to go to western Michigan. Within 24 hours I was there. I took half the pay that I was making. Angie had no job. We were both teachers. If Mark tried to do that on his first job I would have chained him to the bed post and not let him go.

But I did it because I trusted and loved Les Whitley. Three years later, Bill Frieder, who is in the audience now, who I met when he was a high school coach at Flint, Michigan winning state championships, and I was a high school coach in Illinois.

He picked up the phone and he said "pack your bags, you're coming to Ann Arbor."

Never planned! I think so often we get caught up in the process that we don't appreciate kind of what my theme is, the journey of where you're going to go.

I've had the privilege to have some wonderful, wonderful mentors in my life.

I talked about my dad, about my junior high coach. I talked about Les Whitley and I'll talk about Bill Frieder. That I believed, that I trusted and made you feel a part of what was going on. I learned a great deal. What happened to me at Michigan always happens to someone else. Bill left, accepted the Arizona State job. They didn't let him coach the team. I inherited the national championship team.

Three weeks later I went from that nondescript coach that half the people in Michigan did not have a clue who he was, to a guy that's going to the White House, staying all night at the White House, went to a state dinner for the prime minister of Israel, I looked around nervously to see my table. It was table 1, Barbara Bush was at my table, to my right, Bob Hope, to my left, Audrey Hepburn. Bob Hope jumped up and said, "Steve Fisher, the Walter Mitty of college basketball. I watched every game!"

And literally three weeks before, half the people in Ann Arbor didn't know who I was. Life is strange and it has a lot of twists and turns. You never know what that next turn is going to be.

In 1975 Angie and I had been married in August of '74, 1975 I made my first trip ever, here, to San Diego. It was John Wooden's last national championship. Played at the sports arena. I stayed at the biggest hotel in town, the Town and Country. That's where all the coaches stayed, 1975. Lee remembers before the big downtown stuff there! I called Angie I had to use a pay phone to call her! I said you are not going to believe what this city

is like, let's save and see if we can get enough money to vacation here sometime never knowing that all of the sudden we would wind up being a part of the city.

For 18 years we've been a part of this community with great pride, knowing that it's a privilege to be here, knowing that it's a responsibility to be here. Knowing that you have young guys that you have to practice what you preach when you go into homes with and say we will treat them like family.

We've attempted to do that on every piece of the journey. I've had the good fortune to have Brian Dutcher right next to me the whole time. Bill hired Brian in 1988, I believe it was. With the exception of the one little interlude when I was gone to Sacramento with the Kings, Dutch have been together since 1988. That doesn't happen in any walk of life and it never happens in athletics, and it's happened with us. We're a great team. I'm proud of that fact. We've got a great group of coaches who are here today. We've got coaches that have gone on to other jobs that are all proud of the legacy we have helped shape and create at San Diego State.

When I came here, when I was introduced at San Diego State, the first thing I talked about was where I came from. I said if I'm three or five years from now talking about the Fab Five in the first paragraph, we're not doing a very good job here. When I go to the Final Four now, when I went to Phoenix this year, I had people come up and say, Fish I love the job you guys are doing at San Diego State. Fish, tell me about Kawhi Leonard, tell me about what he did for the Aztecs. That is my legacy. San Diego State is my legacy. I'm proud of every step along the way in my journey, but I'm an Aztec. When people say, "Where do you live?" I say with pride, "San Diego."

"What do you do?" "I'm a San Diego State Aztec. I'm a teacher and a coach at San Diego State." I'm always going to be that. What I would like to say in closing is our journey here, we had a dream and a vision and we're 18 years here. Our seniors, Trey and Malik were little, little kids at that time when Trey and Malik came to San Diego State. They came for a reason. They came because they saw what San Diego State had become and they wanted to be a part of it. They wanted to come in and help grow a tradition that now all of us are immensely proud of. I bust with pride when I talk about the championships we've won and the banners we've hung, but I'm most proud of the people that we've had the privilege to coach. D.J. Gay is here also, Skyler Spencer is here today, also. These are really the fruits of our labor and the key to the legacy that we've had and what make us most proud. Tony Bland. Tony Bland won the first postseason game for San Diego State at Division I level. I'll never forget, playing Santa Barbara, first round of the NIT. Tony, who never saw a shot that he wouldn't take, had the ball at the end of the game and wasn't about to give it up. He twisted and turned and hit a basket to win our first ever game. Our first ever NCAA Tournament.

Randy Holcomb called me last night and with pride and tears in his voice he said, "Never a decision that I make that I don't say what would Steve Fisher want me to do!"

That's much more important than the banners that we've got hung and all of the accomplishments. I'm smart enough to know that if we had gone 5-23 for four straight years, there would be no Randy Holcomb, no banners hung, and no Steve Fisher, so I'm smart enough to know that.

The real pride that I take is in the guys that we've had, the players that we have now, the young men that we have now, and the influence that we've had on lives. That makes us feel good. They come back! They come back and they want to be a part of what we're doing.

It's never black and white in terms of timing. Rarely is it black in white in terms of this is absolutely positively what you have to do. You make decisions and then you make your decisions work. You don't look back. You look forward. You make your decisions work. I will never, every second guess did I do it too soon? I did it at the right time for me. Angie and I will be the greatest fans in America for Jan and Liza and Erin and Brian as this program moves forward to bigger and better things. I'm positive that's going to happen. Brian Dutcher is a son of a coach. He's grown up in the game. He knows the business. He's got phenomenal people skills. He will

do a magnificent job. When I talked to the team yesterday, I told them that -- I said driving to pick up Mark today I had a feeling of confidence that the right decision had been made and a feeling of sadness that I wasn't going to be there on the sideline to coach them, but the right kind of sadness and I told them, I damn well better have a piece of that net when you cut it down next year and I better have a ticket to the tournament when we go, because I'm going to be there side-by-side. I'm retiring from coaching, I'm not retiring. Frieder had the best line when he said to Mark Ziegler, "He's going to have so much to do he's going to have to retire from retirement!"

I'm looking forward to the next chapter. I'm always going to be here I'm going to be like that bad penny, you're not going to get rid of me too quickly. I will be here in any way, shape or form that the Aztecs need me. Angie and I and Mark and Jill and their little guy Max and our other son Jay know that we have traveled a great road and a journey that we can look back on with great pride and we're excited about what that next chapter holds not only for us but for Brian and his family and the future of San Diego State basketball. I know it's going to be fantastic. Thank you guys for coming. You made our journey so much more than it could have been. I see John in the distance, he's just retiring now. I told him, I can hold true to my promise. So, John, I'm going to go right out with you, and we'll both be back to watch the Aztecs play many, many games.

Once again, thank you all for coming. I will turn it back over to J.D. We appreciate all of you. Go as Aztecs!

(Applause.)

JOHN DAVID WICKER: Again, thank you, Steve. Sincerely from the bottom of my heart, excited, again, what's happening here today and excited to have you still around and part of the program, part of the family.

STEVE FISHER: Thank you, J.D.

JOHN DAVID WICKER: Brian Dutcher began his coaching career at the University of Illinois with a stop at South Dakota State before joining a Michigan staff that just happened to include Steve Fisher. Dutch has since been an indispensable part of success at Michigan but more importantly the dominant program that has been established at San Diego State. Dutch has a reputation as one of the finest recruiters in the country.

This is easily justified as you look back at the recruiting classes that he's helped secure: Brandon Heath, Marcus Slaughter, D.J. Gay, Kawhi Leonard, Jamaal Franklin and the list goes on. Dutch also brings a great knowledge of the game of basketball, having grown up in a basketball family, and evidenced by the success he's helped engineer throughout his career. 22 postseason appearances, 15 NCAA Tournament berths, three Final Fours, one NCAA title.

Continuity. I've said it before, and it is readily evident today that continuity is a key component of success. Today we transition to a new head coach but we will not miss a beat. We have one of the best coaching staffs in the country and they work together as well as any staff that I've had the privilege of working with. In that, I expect our record of success to continue under the leadership of Brian Dutcher. I'm excited for Brian, wife Jan, daughters Erin and Liza as they embark on this next chapter in their life. It is now my pleasure to introduce Brian Dutcher, who does lose claim to the longest title in college basketball, but more importantly picks up the title that he has earned throughout a stellar career, Head Coach of San Diego State men's basketball. Brian Dutcher!

(Applause.)

BRIAN DUTCHER: Thank you. Obviously I'm a good listener, because I've been with Coach for 30 years and I've enjoyed the journey and smelled the flowers along the way. Back story about that White House visit. We had won the national championship and we're sitting in a staff meeting and the phone rings, and it's the White House. Of course we're instantly thinking this is a gag phone call, so Coach gets on the phone and he gets off and he says they've invited me to a "steak" dinner, and I said, Coach, I think they meant an "estate" dinner!

(Laughter.) Then Bill Frieder, out here, who hired me for my first job, Bill was the coach at Alpena High School, and my dad was the coach at Alpena Community College. I got to know Bill, and his first job he gave me when I got to Michigan, he said, we're going on a European trip. You stay back, get acclimated. I'm going to fly Glen Rice and Rumeal Robinson back. Your only job is to get to the airport. They have to get to get to the Olympic Trials. This was obviously a time when there was no airport security. They were on one flight; I was on another flight. I took them to the airport, hand delivered them to the gate.

I fly to Colorado Springs, I'm in there supposedly after them. I get off the plane, and they're waiting there and they go, where are Glen Rice and Rumeal Robinson. Well they oversold the flight, and like most ingenious young men, they took the cash and took a later flight! (Laughter.) Needless to say, thank goodness Coach Frieder was in Europe with Coach Fisher. That was the start of my career at Michigan.

They say the hardest distance to travel in basketball is that 18 inches from the assistant coaching chair to the head coaching chair. Well, it's taken me 18 years to travel that 18 inches here. I want to just tell you how proud and happy I am to be the next head coach at San Diego State University. It's a time to give thanks. First of all, I would like to thank Steve Fisher for being such a great boss and mentor and most importantly a friend to me over the years.

What better role model to have than Steve Fisher. I would like to thank my wife Jan, daughters Erin and Liza, both San Diego State graduates and proud of it. I would like to thank Jim Sterk, Sally Roush and President Stephen Weber for giving me the longest title in basketball those six years ago when I was the associate head coach, "head coach in waiting."

Then I would like to thank John David Wicker, Tom McCarron and President Hirshman for making this day a reality. I want to especially thank my father, Jim Dutcher, who gave me the passion for the game, and his many years of coaching at Alpena Community College, Eastern Michigan University, where you had George Gervin, and the University of Minnesota.

I grew up around the game, and I saw the passion and the effort and the heartache it can give you, and obviously I went against my mom's better wishes and became a coach anyway, and I am grateful for his influence over me.

I always think it's strange when most coaches take over programs the first thing they say is, we're going to change the culture. I'm here to say I'm going to do my best to maintain the culture of Aztec basketball. It's a culture of academic excellence. It's a culture of social responsibility, it's a culture of family first. And most importantly it's a culture of winning basketball.

It's our charge as coaches and players to maintain that culture that Coach Steve Fisher has set up for us. He set us up for success. It's our responsibility to move forward, take the lessons he's given us and keep the program moving forward. When we first went into homes they looked at us like we were crazy when we told them our goal was to go to a Final Four, and they looked at us and thought, that's impossible you've never hung one banner. But if you don't have that dream and if you don't have that goal of doing it you have no chance of achieving it.

So I will sit here today and say even though Coach Fisher didn't get us there, I'm going to do my best with this group of players and the players to come to get us to a Final Four and have Coach Fisher and all of you with us. That continues to be the goal of San Diego State basketball, to win games and make that improbable run, hard run to a Final Four. That being said, I would like to thank Coach Fisher for all he's done, his years of service to me and Aztec basketball and I will open it up to questions you might have. Thank you.

Q. Coach, congratulations on the greatness and what you've done in this city. What is your greatest work of art? Is it Kawhi Leonard, the 34-3 team? Follow-up for Brian: What's the intangible you take from

that man that you have been sitting 18 inches away from for all those years?

STEVE FISHER: My feeling of our greatest accomplishment would be the players that we've brought in, the young men that they've become, and how over 18 years what they've turned into. I'm proud of who they've become. I said this at our banquet on Sunday. John Wooden was asked what kind of players do you have? What are your players like? And he said, "Wait 20 years and we'll find out."

We're approaching 20 years with some of these guys, and they've gone on to immensely successful careers in their own right, many of them coaching. I think pride is so many directions. People said, no, you can't do that here. Nobody cares. They won't come. You know, 12,414 have come and come with regularity. We turned our building into as "Basketball Times" said, one of the five best environments in college basketball in the nation, along with blue bloods like Duke and Kansas and Kentucky. That gives you great pride.

Most importantly, it's the young guys who are here and those who have left us that I beam with pride for, and the fact that they come back and they want to come back to see us.

BRIAN DUTCHER: Having worked with Coach all these years, the thing I admire most, in a world full of talkers, he is a great listener. I think that's a trait that not a lot of people have. They want to hear themselves say something and they interrupt people and can't get the words out of their mouths fast enough. Coach Fisher has always been a great listener. If I could have one trait that I would like to improve on and continue to improve on is that I'm a better listener, and I think that's his greatest trait.

Q. Coach, congratulations. Over the past day since the news of this broke there has been a tremendous outpouring of emotion from San Diego and well beyond. Assuming that you've seen and felt that, can you respond to the love that this community specifically has for you?

STEVE FISHER: I'm no different than you and anybody else in here. We all like to have nice things said about us. I've never been a leaf in the wind that has to have people patting me on the back and telling me all the niceties. I'm secure in who I am. I know who I am. I'm very, very proud of the fact that in leaving San Diego State now, I do feel that love. I feel as if there is genuine appreciation not just for me -- too often in life the guy at the top, the guy that gets the most pay and the most visibility gets too much of the credit and too much of the blame. This is our program. It's not just me. I've tried to reference that. It's Justin Hutson, who has been with us for ten years; it's Tim Shelton, who we recruited here as a young junior in high school; it's Matt Soria, who was a student manager when I came to town here; it's David Velasquez that I helped get into school, who is back on the coaching staff with us; it's Marvin Adams, who is with us now, and it's all the players that have allowed us to have the success we've had.

I'm proud of the fact that people appreciate what we have done. It makes me feel good and makes me excited to want to come and watch the next chapter, what Brian is going to do with this team. I don't want to whack superlatives, but we're going to be good. We have a room full of guys that can play, we have guys coming in that can play, we have at least one, maybe two recruits coming in this weekend to visit. We're busy. I'm still part of that busy. I'm under contract until June 30th. I'm going to take every paycheck, and I'm going to keep working until June 30th (Laughter.)

So I'm still part of the process, but I'm proud of what's been said and how they've embraced us, not just me.

Q. Dutch, can you tell us over the years how many head coaching offers and interviews you have fended off while be the head coach in waiting and how satisfying it is for this day to come and get the opportunity because you did wait?

BRIAN DUTCHER: You know, I've wanted to help take over something that I helped build. When we got here Coach said, "Dutch, promise me you will come and you will stay three years." He makes everybody promise three years when they come. He doesn't want you looking for the next job. And 18 years later, here I still am.

I've had opportunities and interviews, but my heart has always been here. It's never been about my ego and

being a head coach, to get it quick, to get it fast. I always like to say coaching is a marathon, if you're lucky. So many guys sprint in this business, and they find themselves out of the business in their 30s, 40s. Coach Fisher was 54 years old when he took over San Diego State. I'm 57. I would like to say this journey has been wonderful. I've been with good people the whole time. I've loved my live and never wanted more than what I've had. Now I have what I want, and I'm very grateful for that.