



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

GOAZTECS.COM | @GOAZTECS | @AZTECSPR | #GOAZTECS

San Diego State Press Conference Quotes Tuesday, Sept. 24, 2019

Head Coach Rocky Long

Opening statement:

"Since it's a bye week, it's good and bad. We can use it to our advantage by getting healthy and fresh again, and get some guys up to speed who haven't played very much that maybe can play a little bit more for us. It's also kind of a change in our schedule. I'd much rather be playing this week because you can get another chance to win a game after a loss. (A bye) breaks your rhythm and it might be hard to get into the rhythm next week."

On how you balance trying to keep a rhythm and getting guys healthy:

"We're trying to do both. We're trying to keep practices about the same length. We're doing a little more individual drills to work on technique and fundamentals. We're doing a little bit against each other so that we keep the speed - like the 1's vs. the 1's and 2's vs. 2's - so that we keep the speed of the game. And we're still doing scout work at the same time. It's about half preparation getting ready for the next week and half kind of like spring practice."

On working on some vulnerabilities from Saturday's loss to Utah State:

"There was a one-play difference. If you look the starting position, there was (10) yards difference from where their offense started and our offense started. You look at plays, we had almost the exact same number of plays. You look at yardage, we almost had the exact same number of yardage. We almost had the exact same number of rushing yards and exact same number of passing yards. They completed a certain percentage of their passes almost exactly the same as ours. They had two explosive plays, we had two explosive plays. There was one play difference between the two teams. They intercepted a pass and ran it for a touchdown. We did not. We had a little bit more possession than they did. We had a couple more penalties than they did. There's no real difference between the two teams other than they intercepted a pass and we did not."

On if he's surprised about the struggles of the offense vs. Utah State from half-to-half:

"I'm not surprised because we've changed what we're doing a little bit on offense. I thought it was going to take awhile to get it done. If you count the offense moving the ball, they didn't struggle the first half (vs. Utah State). What they didn't do is score. We had the ball longer, they gained (375) yard and we had 372. We didn't struggle any more than they struggled. The difference is they kicked field goals and we didn't get close enough to kick field goals."

On his thoughts about the offense through the first four games of the season:

"I think we are very inconsistent. I think we're inconsistent throwing it and we're inconsistent running it. Obviously we're not getting the kind of explosive plays that we're kind of used to around here whether it's the run or the pass. When we were scoring 30-something points a game a few years back, we had some 70 and 80-yard runs. We had some kickoff returns for touchdowns. We had some of those kind of things going on that we haven't seen yet."

On if he thinks there is the personnel on the team to make the explosive plays:

"I think so. Everything has to work right for it to happen, but I think we have the personnel that can do that."

On how they can improve as a team:

"Just keep working on it. Keep going in the same direction. Don't change anything. Since we have a bye week, it gave me a chance to evaluate our last game a whole lot more than I would have. You can start looking for ghosts. 'What happened? What happened here?' Guess what? Nothing happened. There were two good football teams playing. They made one more play than we did. One. So you don't change anything. If it's a one-play deal, you don't change anything."

On if he's surprised by any Mountain West teams so far:

"I guess I'm a little surprised on how good our league is. You think there's three or four top teams in our league that are going to kind of dominate the scene. When a San Jose State can go to Arkansas and beat Arkansas (and) Air Force can go to Colorado and beat Colorado. I can give you a whole list of the teams in our league that have gone and beaten Power 5 teams. Guess what? Any team in our league can win the conference championship. What it means is that every game is going to be competitive and every game will be close."

On if this is the best year for the Mountain West since he's been head coach at San Diego State (since 2011):

"I think from top to bottom it has to be. This is the most times that our league has beat Power 5 teams. Someone would have to check the facts for me, but I don't remember any time our league has beaten that many of them."

On his thoughts of San Jose State winning at Arkansas:

"I was pretty surprised. I don't know where Colorado State played Arkansas (at Arkansas), but Arkansas kind of got after them a little bit. San Jose State last year struggled. I think our league is by far the best non-Power 5 league. By far."

On if losing a close game hurts more than losing by a lot of points:

"I think when you lose a game and it was close, I think that's harder to take than when you get blown out. When you get blown out, you chalk it up to experience, go about your business and start getting ready for the next one. When you lose a close game and it turns out to be a one-play difference, I think that's hard to handle. It takes you a little while to get over it. The bye week makes it worse. We'd much rather be getting ready to play rather than doing fundamentals and practicing against each other. We'd much rather be getting ready to play somebody else."

On if he is using the bye week to get Juwan Washington healthy:

"I hope so. He wasn't 100 percent yesterday (at practice) either. I hope he is 100 percent starting next week so we can get ready (for Colorado State)."

On if the team has found its identity yet:

"I think we're still finding our way, especially on offense."

On what a bye week does to get the young guys up to speed:

"It benefits coaches more than it does the players. We get to evaluate how good they might be down the road because they are going to get a lot of work against each other this week that they wouldn't if it wasn't for the bye week. There actually going to scrimmage for about 30 minutes at the end of Thursday's practice. Now these are none of the guys what are playing in games, but it's all the guys who are on the scout team. A lot of them are scholarship kids who we think are going to be good players someday and the only way to really evaluate them is to see them play full speed. So it really helps coaches evaluate. I think it's kind of fun for them too, because they get kind of tired of being on the scout team."

On seeing the renderings of the new stadium and what that will mean to the program:

"Obviously it's going to help the program. Any time you get a brand new program it helps recruiting. I think the size of the stadium is perfect because now you're going to get a full house and it's going to be a homefield advantage for the home team. I think it will be a rallying point for the community. It's fun to go to games where it's packed, loud and energetic. It's a lot more fun than going to a 70,000-seat stadium and have 15 rows between each fan."

Junior offensive lineman Keith Ismael

On the best thing about having this week off:

"(It) gives us time to rest our bodies and get our minds mentally prepared for next week and try and put the loss behind us. It's a good week to work on fundamentals, assignments and take care of our bodies the right way. Having this bye week somewhat early is good to keep us healthy and keep us going. We still have a lot of season (left) to play."

On if he will be watching other games on Saturday on his bye week:

"(I'll) probably watch some football. Since we play so late (most of the time), we watch a couple of games before our game. We love college football, that's why we are playing it. It's an opportunity to wake up early in the morning and fire up the grill and throw some meat on there and watch a couple of games and relax. It'll be pretty nice."

On if losing a close game hurts more than losing by a lot of points:

"A loss is a loss at the end of the day. No matter if it's one play, multiple plays or what you may call it. It stings just as much whether you lose by a lot or lose by a little because you can't change that. We're just trying to put it past us. We're 1/3 of the way through, we still have 2/3 of the way to go. The championship is still in reach, so that's what we are really focusing on. Just trying to get better and learn from this past game. What we can do better and how we can improve, and that's all that matters."

On is it harder to get past the loss on a bye week:

"No, I say this is a good time to decompress a little bit. Now we have extra time to focus on the next opponent instead of rush through it and to try scramble for this next week. I think it's good because we can reflect on the mistakes we made and see what we need to get better on. We have time."

On how would you assess the offensive line since week one:

"We've come a long way, but still have a lot of work to do. Minimalize penalties, we need to get better on assignment and technique work but I feel like physically we are willing and able and we have a good attitude. You know we had a new group at the beginning of the season and we were trying to figure out how to gel and be cohesive, but we are getting comfortable playing with each other and we want to go out and dominate everybody. This week is big on fundamentals and you know once you have a good base you can build from there. I'm excited to see what we can do for the rest of the season."

On how much he looks forward to watching the young guys get to scrimmage this week:

"It's exciting to see those young players get after it. This is a time for a lot of players who don't get time, especially live, it's a good time to prove themselves and show what they can do for the team. Now, this could be a time for them to make a jump into a position, maybe on special teams, or even being a role player on offense or defense. More for the future, it's their time to compete and a lot of them take it as an exciting time. It's good to see that fire from the young guys. It shows that they have a good attitude and a good head about them."

Senior linebacker Troy Cassidy

On the best thing about having this week off:

"I think there's two different ways we could approach this bye week. Our coaches want us to work on getting back to the basics and work on fundamentals. We have bye weeks every four games this season, so it's cut into portions of thirds, so that's the first third of our season. We just want to get back to basics and we are going to be working hard this bye week on just getting back to fundamentals."

On his thoughts of where the team is at four games into the season:

"I think we have yet to reach our full potential. I feel like on both sides of the ball, especially special teams, we have a lot to work on. Defensively, we can still sharpen things up. Offensively, I think we are starting to come together. We've made a lot of improvements since the first game. I think as a team we are getting closer and closer to winning 22 and reaching our full potential and playing to the best of our ability."

On if he takes pride with the success of the Mountain West against Power 5 schools this year:

"It's good to see that the Mountain West, the whole conference, is putting up (wins) and people are starting to take recognition. We've always known that we are a team that can compete with - we believe that we can compete with any team in the country. I think it's starting to get exposed this year and people are starting to take notice of it."

On what the defense can do to get even better this year:

"Our coaches have said this, it's just getting back to fundamentals. I don't feel like we've gotten lazy in practice or anything, we've done a good job. Coach Long has done a good job of keeping us focused week-to-week. But just the little things: not being lazy in our pass rush or when we are in man coverage not holding DBs when we're on 1-on-1s in practice. Not taking a rep off or being lazy and just knowing that it's OK to get beat. But in practice to do it the right way so that in games we can take away those little penalties and stuff that kills momentum for us in games."

On how much he looks forward to watching the young guys get to scrimmage this week:

"I know in the linebacker room alone, we have four freshman that are traveling, and I mean for one position group that's the most that I've seen here in my four years. It's good for the young guys to get more reps for sure and to just try and prove themselves. That's how I came up my freshman year, it was during the bye week and that's when I got pulled up to travel after that. I think it's a good opportunity for the young guys to get a chance to prove that they can play and help us achieve our goals throughout the season."

On what makes it so the freshmen are able to travel and if they are further along than when he played as a true freshman:

"That's a good question. I don't know if I'd say further along because it's funny, I see some similar mistakes that I would make just coming up on special teams. Like just missing the same blocks, just seeing how they're developing is kind of similar to how I was as a freshman. But I think they've done a good job coming in and I feel like they are just really focused on helping the team in whatever way they can. That's all you can really ask for."

On what he remembers learning from the veterans and if he's passing on some of that knowledge now:

"I had (former Aztec linebacker) Calvin Munson, but the whole defense was welcoming to any freshman that was willing to come in and just buy into the system and just work their tail off. That's what we expect out of the younger guys, that's what we demand out of them. And at least in my position group, I've noticed that they've been willing to do that. So we will give them the respect that they deserve and take them under our wing and mentor them in the same way."

-SDSU-