



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State-Boise State Postgame Quotes

San Diego State head coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"It was good to get on the court today and play against one of the top two teams in this league — rightfully so — and to play them in a meaningful game. They were hoping that they could get a piece of the regular season title, and they played like it. They played very aggressive, they played really strong basketball. I told our guys, I'm so proud of the way they've come together down the stretch, and that's when you want to be playing your best basketball — early March. Right now, I think everybody would say the Aztecs are playing their best basketball leading into the conference tournament. We have one more big game left with the regular season champ, Nevada, and they're that for a reason: they're talented, they're well-coached and they're very good. We're going to enjoy this win like crazy tonight and tomorrow when we give the guys a day off, and then we're going to get back to work on Thursday and get our game plan ready for Saturday's home finale, senior night, with Nevada. I'm so happy to have Malik (Pope) on the floor for his senior night. I think we were all surprised when that story came out on Friday morning, no one more surprised than Malik. He kept his chin up, he was truthful, he told us he was innocent, proclaimed his innocence and then went out and proved his innocence. I want to thank (SDSU athletic director) John David Wicker and (associate athletic director of compliance) Andy Humes for helping us with all the compliance and the internal investigation. We pushed through quickly, we were in contact with the NCAA and Malik breathed a big sigh of relief when I told him this afternoon he would be back in the lineup and playing for the Aztecs. You never know how important something is until it's taken away from you. Malik might have missed one game — I'm sure it felt like a month to him — and we're grateful to have him back and on the floor, and looking forward to his senior night with Trey Kell and Kameron Rooks on Saturday here in Viejas."

On Malik returning to the floor:

"I told John David when we talked on the phone, that obviously it's nice to have Malik out there because our chances are enhanced for winning. But I said, the winning is not the important thing to me in regards to Malik, it's clearing his name. It's letting everyone know that this is an outstanding young man that was falsely accused of something. Many people rushed to judgement, like they have a tendency to do, when we withheld him from a game. Everybody wants to say, 'suspended,' and I said at the time that suspension sounds like he's done something wrong. We withheld him from a game. Malik trusted in the coaching staff, the administration and this university, and we're all grateful for the way this worked out and that Malik Pope will be able to enjoy hopefully one of the finest senior nights we'll ever see here in Viejas on Saturday."

On Saturday's game vs. Nevada:

"Let's get this building full for that last game. This team deserves that, these kids deserve that and our seniors deserve that. Let's get the students in the seats. Let's get every person that has a season ticket to either use it or give it away, but let's fill this building for the whole finale on Saturday. This has been a great team this year, and it deserves the support of the fans like they have most every game. I know these eight o'clock games are tough, but our fans show up no matter what time it is and they give us great support, and that energy helps us on our home floor."

On Boise State's shooting percentage tonight:

"Our defense is getting better and it's been getting better for the last six or seven games. Everyone knows (Boise State senior forward) Chandler Hutchison had 40-plus at their place, but I think the biggest thing is, and if you really study it, Malik has become a much better post defender. We've never asked him to be the low post defender. Usually, you had Valentine (Izundu) or Zylan (Cheatham) or you had Skylar (Spencer) and he played the stretch-four defender. He could switch ball screens and stay out there. His development as a help defender to assist on a ball screen and stop Hutchison — and it's a two-man job. It's either Trey (Kell) and Malik or Matt (Mitchell) and Malik that were dealing with all those ball screens. I think we all saw that Malik's help defense has grown exponentially as the season's gone on, and that's just from hard work and something new, playing a new position. I talked to, I don't know how many (NBA) scouts we had here tonight — 34 scouts — and I talked to one of them that Malik is not going to be a center in the NBA, but having to play down there is going to serve him well in the future, having to do that. Whatever level of professional basketball Malik plays next year, I know he doesn't want to be down there but having played down there and done it without complaining, just trying to get better, has helped this team defensively. He's a big reason we're playing better right now defensively."

San Diego State senior forward Malik Pope

On his emotions at the start of tonight's game and getting off to a good start:

"Early game jitters as usual, times two. Definitely excited as well and itching to get out there and play. It definitely got me warmed up kind of quick. I got a good feeling for the game flow and just staying aggressive, so it panned out."

On if he was frustrated not playing over the weekend:

"I was more understanding than anything, just protect the brand and the name of the school. It's definitely a good feeling to be back out there and get all that stuff out of the way, be back playing again and finish out the season the right way."

On if it crossed his mind that he might not be able to play in his senior night game:

"It did cross my mind, but not necessarily to a point where I was dwelling about it because I knew everything would be taken care of eventually and I'd be good to go. For the most part, it was more of just a, 'let's get this process completed, let's get to it.' I was a little nervous at first, like, what's going on? But we're good."

On looking forward to playing senior night on Saturday:

"Four years-worth [of excitement]. Been here since freshman year, struggling. I can't wait for that. It's a great feeling, especially with the group of guys we've got and the coaching staff. I'm excited and can't wait, especially with Nevada on the opposite side. That's going to be great."

On the crowd's enthusiasm when his name was announced in the starting lineup:

"That was a beautiful feeling. Knowing — well, I already knew that because SD is just amazing — but just knowing that they had my back regardless was just a great, great sense of urgency getting into the game. It kind of was motivating. It kind of gave me another chip on my shoulder, like, 'Let's get to it.' For the most part, it was great. I really enjoyed it, enjoyed getting that dub."

San Diego State junior guard Devin Watson

On the team's defense during the second half:

"We really wanted to emphasize defense. We just won four in a row and we wanted to win five, and we knew we had to be great on defense. We had to stop [Hutchison], we had to stop the roll (and) lift. I think we did that tonight and I think we did it well."

On the MW tournament possibilities:

"Whatever hand we get, we're just going to roll with it. Whether it's [a first round game] or the other we're just going to show up ready to play and keep it rolling. We never thought that we were out of it, we've still got goals they still need to get done."

On Trey Kell's new playing style affecting the team dynamics:

Obviously we have a lot of guys who can create plays. Trey has been really facilitating and it's been working out for us. My game still hasn't changed as far as what you're saying. We just have to make the right play, and I think he's been doing that, and I've been doing that, that's why we've been clicking. I knew that [Trey Kell] could easily make plays and create for others."

San Diego State freshman forward Jalen McDaniels

On defensive tactics against Chandler Hutchison:

"I feel like we forced the middle and packed the paint a little bit on them. It was tough for him to get a shot off - digging out, guards trying to swipe at the ball so he couldn't get a lay-up, trying to take charges, just meeting him at the rim, not allowing anything easy. I feel like last time we were kind of late on help, not helping each other as much, not building a wall in transitions so he could get easy buckets."

On Malik Pope being able to play tonight:

"We were just worried about Malik, just keeping it as a family. This is our brother, he was going through something so we were there for him and the coaches we're supportive of that. Us as teammates we were supporting him as well."

On the team confidence:

"We've always had high confidence in ourselves but now that we're rolling - I think it's five (wins) in a row - I feel like our confidence is high and we've just got to keep it like that, stay together and just play hard."

Boise State head coach Leon Rice

On if San Diego State's defense tonight was the difference compared to the last meeting:

"I thought in the first game neither team played bad defensively, just both teams were amazing offensively. They always play great 'D.' They have always been a good defensive program, no question that's what they've hung their hat on. They're long, they're athletic and they're physical in some positions, and in the positions they're not physical in, they're long and athletic. They've got good motors and they're a tough team to score on. They always have been."

On what he tells the team having already locked up the No. 2 seed (in the MW tournament) after a loss like this:

"The best thing about my kids is that they're tough. They're mentally tough and they care about each other. We've got one more home game and it's Senior Night. We've got a special group of seniors so it's about sending them out the right way against a really good Wyoming game. We're going to play a great game. Sometimes there is a lot of emotion involved in that game and that's tough. Everyone in this program wants to send them out the right way and right there is enough motivation for them to want to play."

On Chandler Hutchison's 4-for-14 shooting night compared to the last time the two teams met (when he was 15-for-21):

"Every time he got the ball there were five sets of eyes on him and that makes it tough. That opened some things up in the first half for us to make some threes. We just didn't make them in the second half."

On not being able to get that one shot to turn the momentum:

"Exactly, and the one that jumps out at me was Justinian (Jessup's). It was a good look and I thought it was in. If that goes in it's a two-point game and it's where we go down the stretch. We just didn't get enough of those to drop. The way they were playing we had to make some of those."

Boise State junior forward Zach Haney

On the difference between tonight and the last time the teams played in Boise:

"I think we turned the ball over more than usual and they scored off those. That hurt us."

On starting off strong but maybe losing confidence with all the fouls in the first half:

"I don't think we lost confidence, but the fouls played a part. It's kind of part of the game. We just try to battle through and come out on top."

On getting a bunch of offensive rebounds in the second half:

"I think we were just scrambling, trying to get shots up, make some shots and make things happen. They just weren't falling for us."

On the at-large berth taking a hit tonight and preparing for the MW tournament:

"We have one more game left and we want to win that to send the seniors out the right way. Our goal the whole year is to win the Mountain West tournament so that's what we're going to try to do. We just have to get back to Boise, get back into the gym and get back to the drawing board and figure things out."