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**San Diego State Football Press Conference  
Sept. 7, 2021**

**Head Coach Brady Hoke**

**Opening Statement:**

"First off, I want to really thank our students and Aztec Nation for making the trip up to Carson. It felt like football again. I cannot tell you how much our players and (our staff) all appreciate the students and families, and just Aztec (nation) as a whole. As far as the game, there were highs and lows. There were some things we did well and there are some things we did not do well enough (that) we have got to improve on.

"One thing to note is Matt Araiza and that performance he gave, especially in the second half. Not just Matt, but you look how he was kicking the ball, punting the ball, and our coverage because we were outkicking the (New Mexico State) coverage most of the time, but our guys got down the field. We talked about (our team) awards on Sunday and we gave that whole unit an award because, not just Matt and what he did, but, that unit itself had a lot to do with field position.

"Overall, I think in the first half, we were probably playing like it was our first game. Obviously, it was a first game, but we did not play as well as we are capable on either side of the ball. From an offensive standpoint, we never got in rhythm. Defensively, give (New Mexico State) some credit. I thought they had a good plan trying to get the ball out quickly, which reminded me of Utah State and what they did with Jordan Love in 2019, getting rid of the ball quickly. Coach Mattix did a good job at halftime and was able to make some adjustments. At the end of the day we ended up with five sacks, 10 tackles for loss and we had 18 hits on the quarterback.

"In the second half, I thought we played much better. Offensively, we responded well. We had 21 points, 224 total yards of offense. But we have got to start faster. That is one of the things that was a little bit of a hangover from a year ago, but we've got to do a better job.

"We had penalties that are unacceptable. When you look at personal fouls, that goes to me. I have got to make sure we correct that and represent the university and ourselves in a better fashion than we did with those three penalties. We are really proud to be 1-0. It is a heck of a lot easier to make some corrections and (work on) fundamentals and any other things that we did poorly this game when you win a game, instead of losing the game. This will give us some time to do it before taking on Arizona on Saturday."

**On Matt Araiza and the entire Special Teams' performance:**

"He should have won it (Mountain West Special Teams Player of the Week). When you look at the 100 yards he saved us, it was incredible what he did. The other thing (that was incredible) is how well the punt team got down the field and how (well) they covered. That was truly 11 guys doing their job playing together."

**On his initial thoughts on facing Arizona:**

"In their second half on Saturday against BYU, they played really well. I think they are very physical team with 14 new guys playing for them. I know (Arizona head) Coach Fisch because he coached with my brother at Florida, and I know they are going to be all offensive minded to some degree. But, with Dan Brown [Arizona's defensive coordinator] defensively they are going to be a team that likes to pressure. It is going to be a great environment (at Arizona) with it being their first home game with a new coaching staff - they have a lot of juice going. It will be fun and we look forward to it. "

**Senior running back/kick returner/punt returner Jordan Byrd****On the offense starting off slow on Saturday:**

"It was the first game. You have to get the jitters out. I felt like we had to come together as a team. We talked about at halftime. We knew we had to play (better), we knew we had to play like Aztecs. We came out there in the second half and all played together. We just had fun out there in the second half. We struggled in the first (half), but just communicating and talking to each other to get the game right again."

**On the first play to start the second half that looked like it was going to be a loss but turned into an 18-yard gain:**

"It was big. My running back coach - Coach Horton - told me on the sideline that it was a big play that started (the turnaround). That drive we scored. I felt like that play got us a little heart and just made our (offensive) linemen block even more. They got Greg (Bell) into the end zone right after a deep pass to Kobe Smith. That's what really started it too. (Bell) getting into the end zone really started it off and made the defense play even harder."

**On his touchdown run:**

"Watching the film it was really cool to see everybody work together. Coming from Kaegun Williams at running back bringing four defenders to him. That's what really set it up for me and then watching both of my linemen, especially (Alama Uluave) moving up to the free safety, that was really cool to see on film. Especially everyone getting excited, (including the) fans. It was cool to see the fans and my teammates going crazy on the sideline."

**On the punt return miscue:**

"I know we had a mistake with dropping the ball. We just didn't have good communication out there. I talked to my teammates after that play. We all got in a huddle and talked about what we had to do. After the game as well we talked about what we have to do this week. A lot of the things we have to fix is more communication, me saying 'Peter' a lot louder because I know there's going to be a lot of fans at this game. It felt like they were kicking the ball a little bit shorter. We were rushing a lot. There were a lot more 'Peter' calls and more of a high ball (off the punter's foot)."

## **Junior defensive end Cameron Thomas**

### **On the defense playing much better in the second half against New Mexico State:**

"I think we just stuck to our fundamentals. We wanted more turnovers. I think we got three and we're kind of greedy, we wanted more of that. We had some good energy, especially after the halftime. We just came out rolling and played the way the Aztec defense should be played, which is hard and physical."

### **On playing a Pac-12 opponent on Saturday:**

"I think it's very cool to play out of conference teams, especially guys in the Pac-12. It's just a great opportunity this weekend. It's going to be a big environment, a very exciting environment. I look forward to both (this game and the following week against Utah)."

### **On the play from backup defensive end Jalil Lecky:**

"Jalil did a great job but that was expected out of him. I was excited to finally see him expose his talents to everybody. It was no surprise to see that come out of him. We have really, really good depth (at defensive line) and I expect more stuff like that throughout the season."

### **On if they would like to get as much pressure on Arizona like they did against New Mexico State:**

"I think it's very important, especially with the experience we have up front. Getting to the quarterback is a very big deal and it's expected out of us. With out secondary being young, I think it's important for us to get as much pressure on the quarterback as possible."

**-SDSU-**