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San Diego State Women's Basketball Press Conference

October 10, 2017

SDSU head coach Stacie Terry

Opening Statement:

"This is a really exciting time for us, the start of our season. As of this morning, we have seven practices under our belt and I'm really happy where we are now as a team. We had a great summer. We really spent some time in the weight room, getting in shape and getting stronger. We're looking forward to see what November brings us. I'm really excited about this team. We have six seniors. We have a lot returning. We have almost 80 percent of our scoring coming back so I'm confident that we'll be very effective on that side of the ball. Our All-Mountain West player in McKynzie Fort will be returning for her senior season. She's been all-conference quite a few times and second in the league in scoring so we're expecting big things from her. And obviously, we're returning one of the best shooters in the league in Lexy Thorderson, who led us in 3-point percentage, second in points and was second in the league in 3-pointers made last year so I'm excited about that. With all of that experience and leadership coming back, we've moved along at a much faster pace than we have in the past so I believe we're further along than we were. We have a lot of depth, the most depth that I've had in my short years here at San Diego State. Because we have that depth, we've been able to do a little more in practice. Our practices are much more competitive, which has pushed our seniors to get better. We're excited about our freshman class. We bring in five young women who were really excited to be Aztecs. They were ranked nationally, 23rd nationally overall and number one in the Mountain West so we expect big things out of our freshman class so we expect them to contribute early and often. The two things that we've identified that we need to improve upon is no secret: our defense and rebounding. That's been the emphasis and the point of concern all throughout the summer and the first week of practice. I'm happy with where we are. Obviously we have a lot more to improve, a lot of things we can improve on in those areas, but we're looking better there so I'm pretty confident we'll be able to score the ball and hopefully, we'll be able to stop it a little bit, too. But I'm excited about where we are and am looking forward to this next week of practice and where that takes us."

On what she sees out of the team defensively that she thinks will make the team better:

"An attitude. We're trying to create a culture where that's our identity. I'm confident we'll be able to score the ball but sometimes, those shots don't fall. What can we rely on? We've talked a lot about relying on each other and focusing on the defensive end. We've done some team bonding, and team-building stuff about 'tough' and 'together' because we have to play that way at all times. We have 17 young women on our roster with two walk-ons so there is going to be a lot of opportunity, which I alluded to in the competition in practice, and we have to take that mentality every time we step onto the floor that we're going to out-work them and we're going to defend and rebound. Changing that mindset has been our focus thus far. It's probably more mental than physical, changing how we've done things in the past. It's been a huge part of our progression as a team and our kids are really buying in. I think you're going to see a much-improved defensive effort and rebounding effort on the floor."

On how quickly she sees the freshmen contributing:

"I don't want to limit them to say no. They're really talented. We've had a couple that have been injured and are coming back from concussions. One of our freshmen rolled her ankle pretty good so she's trying to find her way. But they have really raised the level. They're very talented and before they get out of San Diego State, they're going to have a huge imprint on our program. I do think that they're going to play. I do think they're going to contribute. What I love about the freshmen is that they're fearless. A lot of them have come from very good high school programs and obviously, they're adjusting to the pace and the physicality and how often we practice and so on and so forth. But they know how to win and they bring that toughness to our practice which has elevated our upperclassmen and that's what I'm most excited about with our freshmen. I got on our seniors pretty good the other day because our second team beat our first team. I was getting on our upperclassmen but was excited about the future because that's what it's about."

On identifying a player at the post position:

"We're working on that. We're healthy in the post position so that's a good thing. [Junior forward] Arantxa [Gomez Ferrer] has really separated herself because she has been the most consistent. If I had to start today, I would start her. But [sophomore forward] Baylee Vanderdoes is really picking up her game and working harder every day, [sophomore center] Naomi Ekwedike, who is a difference-maker for us, is 6-6 which is probably going to be one of the bigger kids in the conference so she's a game-changer just because she's on the floor. Figuring out how I can incorporate those two in the mix at that position, along with Arantxa, is going to be the challenge thus far but they all bring something different. If we could get those three to be just a little bit consistent, that could be our secret weapon, our five play."

On what the team has done away from the court to build its toughness and togetherness:

"We challenged our seniors and our captains to do a lot of it and we have the best leadership that we've had here and I think just that alone is going to equate to a couple more wins. They've done a lot as a team. We have monthly meetings with my captains and me and we talk about what we're going to implement that month in their weekly meetings with the team so letting them lead -- because when it's all said and done, they're on the court and they're playing together and they have to do it for each other so teaching them how to lead in those adverse moments is what we've been focusing on. We had a team meeting the other day. I had them write paragraphs about what toughness means to them, what togetherness means to them and then they had to identify sentences in those essays that speak to them. Talking and sharing and opening up and letting them know that we're all in this together. I think if we can do this as a unit, we might surprise some people this season."

On seniors McKynzie Fort and Lexy Thorderson studying abroad last summer:

"First off, I want to thank our leadership, our athletic director and our university for allowing those opportunities to happen. Two of our young ladies were able to go abroad this year and they both came back more mature, changed women. McKynzie had such an impactful trip. She went to the Dominican Republic. She appreciates things more. She saw poverty. She saw the joy that these young people have playing basketball and with much less than what we have in the United States. She's come back with a renewed sense of appreciation for the game and that has lifted her spirit and her leadership. She's just a better person for it. Along with that, and Lexy's experience, as well, was very similar, McKynzie, Lexy and [senior guard] Geena [Gomez] have done a fantastic job leading. Some of that comes with becoming a senior. You realize that your time is running out so they're paying attention to the details. McKynzie came back and the stories she shared were so emotional. She's connecting with her teammates, she's connecting on a different level outside of basketball so I think that's going to help our team grow because we'll be closer and we'll be together."