

**August 6, 2012**



Press conference with:

## **COACH ROCKY LONG**

**NAT BERHE  
JAKE FELY  
LEON MCFADDEN  
ALEC JOHNSON  
GAVIN ESCOBAR  
COLIN LOCKETT**

### **Opening statement:**

COACH LONG: "It's always fun to get started. It's a big lead up all summer long when you're waiting to get ready to go. We looked really good in the walk-through this morning. Of course, it's kind of like the NFL walk-through, you can't touch each other, you can't be in pads, you can't use a ball and you walk-through and act like you're learning plays and learning defensive assignments and all that. So, I'm waiting for tonight's practice to see (how the team looks)."

### **Q. Do you have any injured players who won't be on the team this season?**

COACH LONG: We have got two. Paul Pitts is not here in training camp because we have a limit in training camp on 105 guys. Paul Pitts hurt his knee in spring practice and probably won't be ready to go for another six to eight weeks. So he's not out there and probably won't play this year. I'm guessing he won't play this year.

Kenny Galea'i has a broken foot. He's probably got another two to three weeks before he would be cleared to go 100% and so he's not

out there, either. All of the rest of them are out there.

We had several surgeries after the end of last season and we had a couple at the end of spring ball and they have all been cleared to practice.

You know, the first two days are just helmets. The next two days are helmets and shoulder pads. And not until Friday do we get to go full pads. So you won't really be able to tell until Friday whether all of those guys are able to hold up when people start running into them full speed.

### **Q. How well settled is the depth chart?**

COACH LONG: You always start with the depth chart. That gives you, so when you go to practice, you can say ones against ones against ones and twos against twos and all that kind of stuff. You say that once get this there, but that can be adjusted daily. That can be adjusted during a practice, which happens quite a bit. In our program it happens quite a bit. A guy who is not going full speed or who makes an assignment error, sometimes he will go from first team to second team and sometimes it goes all the way down to the third team running with the starters.

Now with about ten days going before the first game, now the depth chart is pretty solid and we have worked on our game plan and all that. So there's not much chance that you would lose your spot. If you're a starter with ten days to go, you're probably not going to lose your spot unless you play really poorly in the first game.

### **Q. Are some positions still pretty much open for competition?**

COACH LONG: That's true, they are open for competition. But you can go down the list just as well as I can go down the list. If you have a player in a position that has had a really good career up to this point and he's been a starter up to this point, there's very little likelihood that he's going to lose his spot. I would say Leon McFadden is going to start in the first game

You know, even though it's open, it's open

for competition. They are all open for competition. Gavin Escobar, I would just guess he is going to start in the first game. You can pick out the roster and you know which ones are the starters and which ones aren't, even though they all think they are competing.

**Q. One of those starters, Jake Fely, can you talk about the year he had last year and what you're looking from him this year?**

COACH LONG: Jake had a good year. Sometimes his size is a deterrent because he's not very tall and he's not very big and he runs up against a lot of real tall 300-pound guys that can knock him around, throw him around a little bit. He uses his athletic ability and his quickness to overcome some of the size issues and then he really diagnoses plays well. He sees what the play is a lot quicker than a lot of linebackers do.

**Q. Are you looking for the same thing on defense this year as you did last year?**

COACH LONG: On defense, we play a lot of guys. Last year, we averaged 24 guys in a game on defense and that's the same way we'll do it this year. I mean, Rob Andrews got hurt, broke his foot last year and he's coming back and he was a starting middle linebacker before he got hurt and Jake took over.

So you've basically got two starters at middle linebacker. That's a good problem to have.

**Q. How do you feel about depth that you have?**

COACH LONG: I feel really good at the linebacker position. I feel really good in the secondary. I don't know what to think of our defensive line. There's a whole bunch of guys up there that we are counting on that have not played very much.

Now, they are kind of talented athletes but my opinion is the closer you get to the line of scrimmage, the more mature and tougher you have to be. You can play wide receiver and you can be a corner and you can be a freshman and be 16, 17 years old and weigh 155 pounds and get along just fine out there. If you're a defensive tackle or center, guess what, you put a 165-pounder in there, an immature kid is going to get beat up.

We have a lot of young guys on the defensive line, so we are worried about how they are going to hold up. We have three new starters

in the offensive line, even though those guys have played quite a bit. The offensive line is not as critical as the defensive line. We have to have some young guys step forward and play.

**Q. Can you remember when you had as young a line as you do now defensively, and how did that go?**

COACH LONG: I've been coaching so long, I'm sure it happened before. I don't necessarily remember right now when it happened. I would guess it was fine. I don't know, we are going to be pretty good. Those defensive linemen might not be very good the first couple of games, but to survive, they have got to get better.

By the third or fourth game, those defensive linemen are going to be just fine and on defense we'll be good. I'm more optimistic than some of the (prognosticators).

I wouldn't view our team the same way as they do, no way.

We are all worried about losing Ronnie Hillman and Hillman was a great player. I'm not concerned. We are going to get just as many yards and score just as many touchdowns, but it's going to be three guys doing it instead of one. I don't know, I guess the fans won't like it because it won't be quite as flashy, but the production is going to be the same.

And we lost a great quarterback. Ryan Lindley might be considered the best quarterback ever played here. We've got two quarterbacks now. I don't know if they are as good as Ryan, but last year I was really worried Ryan might get hurt because I didn't know who the backup was going to be.

Now we have two guys that can play that are competing for the job.

**Q. Do the prognosticators motivate you at all?**

COACH LONG: When I first started coaching about a hundred years ago, you used that as motivation. I learned, 15-20 years ago, just ignore them. I really read those magazines to look at depth charts of the other team.

They have the most current depth charts because coaches don't like to give that stuff out in the spring and in the summer. So those magazines, they watch practice and tweet it to everybody in the world so they have the closest thing to a real depth chart in the summer. So then I

can go and watch film and evaluate the players that they have on the depth chart instead of wasting my time evaluating a guy that graduated and I didn't know he graduated.

So there are benefits to those magazines.

**Q. How will your team be as those defensive linemen are taking three games to get up to speed, considering your schedule?**

COACH LONG: It's more about the schedule than us. Washington has a really good team coming back. In my opinion, they are in the top third of the Pac-12. They have, in my opinion, one of the top five quarterbacks in the country. He's really good. If you watched the bowl game between Washington and Baylor, you know what I'm talking about.

So we will know early in the season how good we can or will be, because that will be a very tough opponent on us. It's in a pro stadium and I heard that's really loud. They will get a big crowd. We are playing late at night and we have got a whole bunch of things against us and we'll see where we stand.

Then we have to come back here and play Army, and it's Army's first game. For those that know how this works, when you have three days to get ready for a triple-option team, you are at a huge disadvantage. I wish it was our first game, and then we could spend two weeks getting ready for it and it would be equal but they are going to spend their whole training camp getting ready for us because we beat them last year.

I think early in the season we'll see where we're going to be. I think we'll hold up okay.

**Q. Do you like the schedule?**

COACH LONG: When I first became a head coach, I worried about the schedule and where they were sending us and all that kind of stuff. I have no control, so why worry about it.

**Q. What do you worry about then?**

COACH LONG: I worry about making our team as good as it can be. I worry about winning. We don't play this game just to look good. Everything we do, you look back there on the board, we had our first competition in our meeting today. The offense is ahead 2-1. That's right up there. We compete every meeting, we compete every practice, we compete walking in the door, because there's no reason to play unless you want to win.

**Q. How do you make players compete in a meeting?**

COACH LONG: Here is one of the questions today. So you pick out a guy on offense and you pick out a guy on defense and this might be good for everybody in this room, too. For a young man that's 18 to 22 years old, even though we teach him, he does not know the legacy of this program very well. And there was a guy that played here that was a pretty good player that I played with in Canada by the name of Carl Weathers. So this will get all of you because you all know who I'm talking about.

So I asked the kids in the meeting if they knew who Carl Weathers is or how Carl Weathers became famous after he stopped playing football. They had no idea he was Apollo Creed, none whatsoever, except one kid knew who Apollo Creed was. He was on offense. The offense is always smarter than defense, anyway.

**Q. What's your situation at quarterback?**

COACH LONG: I have not made a decision. We are going to let Adam Dingwell and Ryan Katz compete for the first week of camp and we'll make a decision early on. I mean, they competed all spring, too. We have seen the good and bad of both of them. They have had good days and bad days, so we'll have a starter to he can get most of the reps the last couple of weeks of camp before we can play our first game.

**Q. What do you like about Katz and what have you seen so far?**

COACH LONG: Basically, he's a very accurate passer. He's a really good athlete in the pocket. He's not necessarily a runner, but he can be. He can get out of trouble which gives you a little bit more time, especially if you think that you might be a little bit inexperienced in the offensive line.

He's been there. I don't know when the last time he played in Washington was, but I bet you he already played in Washington. He's been in a big stadium and he's been in a big game. One of the better rivalries I've been around is the Oregon State - Oregon game, and he's played in that game.

So none of that will bother him. None of that will bother Adam Dingwell, either, to be honest

with you, but Adam has not actually done it.

So you never know if it's going to bother him or not until they actually get into that situation. It's not going to bother Ryan Katz, because he's already been there. So I mean, that's his advantage.

**Q. What is Dingwell's advantage?**

COACH LONG: Adam Dingwell is one of the toughest guys on our team. And that might not mean anything to anybody else, but guess what, it means a whole bunch to me, and it doesn't matter what position they play.

He's a great competitor and he can will his team to win, and he can will his team to score touchdowns. He's a good athlete and he's not quite as accurate with the ball as Ryan Katz is. He's just as good an athlete and probably a better runner. He gets out of trouble and that's part of his problem, because he wants to make the play himself. In practice, he gets mad when we blow the whistle when he takes off. He wants to lower a shoulder and take those linebackers on.

But a quarterback that's a tough guy, guess what, you win a whole bunch of games with a tough quarterback.

**Q. Are there any true freshmen that you think could have a chance to compete for the job?**

COACH LONG: I don't think so, but they surprise me all the time. The first ten days of camp will give every freshman a chance to prove he's going to be in our two-deep and if they are going to be in the two-deep, we give them the option of playing or not. Because a lot of them want to redshirt, and we always try to convince them to redshirt, even if they could play for us, we try to convince them to redshirt because they are so much better players as fifth-year seniors than they are as freshmen. They are so much better.

But if a freshman was going to be in our two-deep, we ask him if he wants to redshirt or if he wants to play. If he's not going to be in the two-deep, he has no choice; he's going to redshirt.

**Q. How's the special teams situation?**

COACH LONG: I did that on purpose. I don't know who our punter is and I don't know who our kicker is. I don't know who our long snapper is, either. We have got two long snappers out there and we have got two punters and we have got four

kickers out there that get to compete all during camp.

That decision of who the punter is, who the kicker is and who the deep snapper is won't be made until the first game because you have to put them into situations where it's kind of live, where it's kind of a scrimmage situation and the best guy gets to do it.

**Q. How about the receivers, are you feeling more confident?**

COACH LONG: Our receivers are the deepest position on our team. After last year, that's one of the reasons its deep is because Colin Lockett has turned into a really good player and Dylan Denso is turning into a really good player. And those guys, the first time they played was last year. Brice Butler is a transfer that has great ability. Ezell Ruffin has great ability and Jemond Hazely has great ability. And these are our young guys. Larry Clark has great ability. They all have real talent.

But we have got experienced guys. We have got three guys that have played a lot of football. Dominique Sandifer, who we thought was going to be starting wide receiver last year but injury kept him from doing it, he's healthy again. We thought he would be our best receiver last year, so that's a complete turn around. Last year we were trying to figure out guys to be receivers, and this year we have all kinds of them.

**Q. Any thoughts on Ryan Lindley?**

COACH LONG: Ryan is going to make it. I don't know how long it will take, but he will eventually be a starting quarterback in the NFL which is a pretty good gig.

**STUDENT-ATHLETES**

**Q. How has the off-season workout program been with Adam Hall?**

LEON McFADDEN: We came back stronger and faster than we've ever been. (Adam Hall) brought back some of the old things that Coach Hoke left with, but it's helped us in the offseason both in the film room and on the field. Everything he does with us is all explosiveness and we are going to be good this year.

**Q. How do the opinions of the**

**prognosticators affect the team?**

JAKE FELY: There are always going to be opinions from everybody else that we are going to be the underdog, because we are San Diego State and we are supposed to be underdogs.

Personally, this year we are going to go out with a bang and everybody is just going to feel for us to do better on the field. Just because people were thinking that we are lower than nine out of ten of the conference teams. We are above that and that's going to influence us and motivate us to do better on the field and also in the film room so we can get smarter. So I feel like we are better than what people are thinking.

**Q. What are your thoughts on Coach Long saying that you guys are one of the strongest positions on the team?**

JAKE FELY: We do definitely have a lot of depth on our linebacker corps. Our main focus is our new linebacker coach, so he's going to help us get better and take the leadership that Miles Burris left. Since Miles left he has been a big part of our linebacker core and he was a good leader. So having a new coach and having Rocky Long in there is going to help influence us to get better and to help the team and help our defense.

**Q. As the top returning tackler on this team, do you feel like you have bigger responsibilities in terms of leadership or what does that mean?**

NAT BERHE: It just adds more pressure to perform. But you know, the great ones rise to the challenge of being able to be leading tackler, again, and again.

So I'm not too worried about it. Just see it as a stat and that's about it.

**Q. How much more comfortable are you guys with Rocky's defense and how much of a factor do you think that will be this year playing this style?**

LEON McFADDEN: This 3-3-5 defense is a hard defense to learn. It takes about two to three years to actually understand the scheme and understand where everybody goes.

So we should go into this year knowing this defense better than we did this past year. It's a defense where all 11 heads are on the ball and you really have to pay attention to your position and knowing what your assignment is.

**Q. What makes the defense so hard to learn?**

LEON McFADDEN: Playing with an extra defensive back on the field, he needs to know where he needs to go at all times. The Aztec position is a hybrid linebacker/safety so he has to be able to cover somebody in the slot and that takes a lot of skill.

**Q. Is this the year you and the others from Oceanside take a step forward as an Aztec?**

JAKE FELY: Everyone is going to think that we all came from a school where we were, but it's all about San Diego State now. We're all about trying to win here and having a winning record all the time. That's what I want to bring here. Even though we are from Oceanside, people are all going to think we're Oceanside, I'm San Diego State now and that's where I want to be from.

**Q. Coach talked about obviously the defensive line is a little bit young; is there some sense of wanting to pick those guys up, and how will you do that from a leadership standpoint?**

LEON McFADDEN: The young guys know and Coach Long harps on it every day, it's all about competing, nobody has a set spot. All of the young guys that are filling in, Sam Meredith and Dontrell Onuoha, all of those guys are competing for that No. 1 spot. That's all it comes down to and at the end of the fall, we'll know who will be our starting D-Line.

**Q. Colin, obviously you were on the other side of the ball at one time; from your perspective, having played in the Mountain West, how far has Leon come?**

COLIN LOCKETT: I remember when we were getting recruited Leon was on my recruiting trip and me and him bonded really well, got on very nice our first year. I think we were weight lifting partners. Leon has come a long way. He has come a long way as everybody else.

Leon has been starting basically since his freshman year and I feel like he's the most complete out of all of the corners that I've seen. He has it all. He has the competitive aspect, the speed, he jumps high. You guys interview him and he's great at that, too. Leon has come really far, and he's definitely going to make an impact now



and even at the next level.

**Q. How do you look at this wide receiver group now compared to last year?**

COLIN LOCKETT: I see across the board, you know, five, six receivers that can all make an impact this year. We have got tall guys. We have got short, shifty guys. We have got fast guys. We have got, you know, guys that you can stretch and guys that you can block. It's a total, complete whole as a wide receiver group; you have the tall, the short and I feel like that's going to be the most important thing that we have depth.

We didn't have as much depth last year and we didn't have the experience at all last year. Denso had four plays or five catches or something like that, and so now we have got the experience with me and Denso, and even Osmond Nicholas and Dominique (Sandifer) coming back from the injury and he was the third receiver with Vincent (Jackson) and DeMarco (Sampson).

So we have got the experience like I said, and we have got all the tools to be one of the best wide receiving corps in the nation.

**Q. Has Ryan Katz already shown that he is an experienced guy?**

ALEC JOHNSON: It's something you feel. It's kind of an aura that you just feel he has confidence and experience, something that comes when you're a senior and you have some experience at the position. So you definitely feel that.

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