



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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Postgame Quotes: Air Force at San Diego State
Steve Fisher Court at Viejas Arena | San Diego, Calif.
Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022

Brian Dutcher, San Diego State head coach

Opening Statement:

"I told the team yesterday that playing Air Force is like going to the dentist. You know you have to do it. You know what's good for you, but it's no fun. That's what it was. This game was good for us. I'm usually nervous playing Air Force on a three-day prep and we had a one-day prep. We like to get up the line deny, play the gaps and strip the ball. But against Air Force we had to play below them. We had to get that done in one day where we kept everything in front of us. We had to try to not to give up too many bad cuts and we gave some up. Try to play AJ Walker, who had 17 on our 30-2 team in the first half of the conference tournament. We know what he can do. So it was no surprise when he went to work on us. He's a good player, but we stayed the course. We made a few adjustments at halftime and got Nathan (Mensah) a little higher defensively. We got enough stops to go on a run and then once we got the lead, we played comfortably."

On the difficulty of a one-day prep:

"Yeah, usually in the past when we played Air Force, we always struggled to manufacture points. It was almost like we weren't comfortable with what we were running offensively because they play the matchup zone and are switching man. Last year, we probably had our best offensive performance of the season at Air Force. So we went back and looked at tape and saw how we did that. We kind of had a game plan offensively in mind. We knew what would work. I was told it's our highest field goal percentage in nine years, 62 percent, for the game and probably a high on the season in assists, so offensively we played well. A lot of times when you play Air Force, not only are they hard to guard but they're hard to score against. So we scored points today and we got them from everybody. I think we had 25 off the bench; Tahirou (Diabate) and Chad (Baker-Mazara) each had nine off the bench. So everybody that played contributed not only defensively, but at the offensive end which was really fun to see because with eight games in 22 days, we're going to need our bench to produce."

On the difficulty of playing a team that wants to slow things down like Air Force:

"Our tempo is slow anyway because we guard so hard. I think our defense makes teams play for 30 seconds every shot clock and Air Force plays 30 seconds. So the key to Air Force is not giving them offensive rebounds, so you don't have to guard 30 seconds... then you guard 30 more in the same possession. We all know that their pace can affect the game and really wear a team out. But I thought we did a pretty good job tonight."

On the team getting 17 assists on 25 made baskets:

"I love the assists, but like I said we had a game plan from last year that worked, and we ran the same game plan with the same spacing. Obviously, we didn't have the shooters we had last year. In last year's game plan, we made a ton of threes with (Jordan) Schakel and (Terrell) Gomez. We used the same game plan and got it inside more. We drove it, we spaced the floor and we spread them out. We slipped in there off ball screens and found our way to the rim. I thought that really helped."

Nathan Mensah, San Diego State senior forward

On what makes the Air Force offense difficult to defend:

"We had to have a new set of plans just to (control them), because it's mostly about like back cuts. So it's not what we are accustomed to. So it was different today."

On the difficulty of preparing for Air Force in one day:

"It's really hard because first of all the cuts. You see them on film, and you think 'we can adjust quickly because of how talented we are.' But as soon as the ball goes up, they keep on doing the same thing over and over. So, it can become frustrating when you let just one slip away. You feel bad for yourself, and you feel you let the team down. It's kind of like a mind game. Where they'll play you to sleep in order for them to get one shot at a time, one shot at a time. So it's kind of hard every time we play against them."

On the reason the Aztecs wore black uniforms in the game so Air Force could wear grey to honor former Falcon player Ryan Swan's battle with brain cancer:

"It's kind of hard to hear like a story like that from a guy that you've competed against and hearing the struggle that he's facing now was a bit shocking. People think we're invincible or supernatural people but we are just human like everyone else. So, hearing a statement like that was really hard. We are all saying prayers for him."

Keshad Johnson, San Diego State junior forward

On what changes were made on AJ Walker in the second half:

"Um, it wasn't really what changed with me, it just is what changed as a whole (for the team). He started off about seven for seven and most of those shots were contested. He's a great basketball player and with great basketball players, when they are hot, (there's) not too much you can do. You just got to keep playing. And that's basically all I did. I had to keep making it tough on him and it ended paying off in the end."

On if they are looking forward to the Utah State game:

"Of course, we're looking forward to the rematch. They're a tough team and we know what to expect. So we've just got to go back to the drawing board and prepare. Just like we had a one-day prep for Air Force, we'll prepare for them."

On the challenges of the quick turnarounds this year:

"That's probably one of the biggest challenges the team has had to face this year; the quick turnarounds and having to make up the games that we lost. But we're San Diego State basketball, and we prepare better than anyone else in the NCAA."

Joe Scott, Air Force head coach

On the game:

"Well, I thought we fought. All we talked about was being so tough. You want to play against this team against the San Diego State. They have become the class of the league through the years, and they do it by just competing like you can't believe. I just said we got to show them we know what happened last year when we played them and we have to show we are different. The first thing is competing and being physical and being tough. Knowing that that's what the game was, I thought our guys did a good job of that. And because when you do a good job of that, then you can stay in the game. I think what was really good for us today was we turned the ball over 11 times against the number one defense in the country. You got to make those become staples. If you can do that in their building where they're unbelievable. It's become one of the better home courts in the country. If we can do that against them. That's what we got to say, you know, we got to do it every game because it is hard to do it against them. That's what they hang their hat on and I thought we did a pretty good job of handling their pressure today very much on our guards or three guards that did a good job of handling any type of thing they were doing to us. You're never happy with when you don't get the result you want."

"We obviously keyed in on Bradley. I thought we did a really good job on him but you got to give the other guys credit because those guys they the other guys stepped up today and they did put the ball in the basket and it wasn't just one other guy for them. They know when they are looking at them (it is) like well, it's Bradley and can they find somebody else? Well today, they all sort of came through for him. I know you know, that's the old thing, pick your poison. You know what I mean? Can we do a little some little better? Can we rotate better out of whatever we're trying to do with Bradley in the big guys? But you got to give their guys credit for stepping up and you know, on a day when we held Bradley to whatever we did (13 points) they got 76 points. You got you got to give them credit, their supporting cast for stepping up and playing well today.

How different would the game have been if you had made more three-pointers:

"That's what I said to our guys. I mean you fight you stay in games you battle we competed and everybody knows we got to make shots and that means if it's an open three you got to make that open three you know I'm not always talking about like the hard to win the guys on yet. I know we got some open looks at three and you know, you got to make more than 4-for-18. The good thing is we only turn it over 11 times. We got a lot of twos, which means we're running our offense well. Then what you have to add to that is you got to go 7-for-18 and who knows what that does to the to the outcome, but I know that's what's required to come in this building and one day, win in this building. You got to do all of that. You know, I think like anything that's a growth that's a work in progress for our team.

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