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San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes

Tuesday, Dec. 10, 2019

Fowler Athletics Center

Head Coach Rocky Long

Opening statement:

"It's good to have everybody here. Obviously, we're excited about getting to go to the bowl game in New Mexico. We found out on [Bowl Selection] Sunday or whatever they call it when they tell you exactly where you're going after all the speculation and all those kind of things. But we're happy that we're going to a bowl game. It's a short period of time, so we won't get to develop our team for next year like we normally do because we're playing so soon. Playing against a really good football team that has had great success and a great turnaround from 1-11 to where they are now in a bowl game. So they've done a great job of getting ready to play this year and they get to go, too, so it ought to be a good game."

On Central Michigan head coach Jim McElwain:

"When he was at Colorado State, he had great success. That's how he got the Florida job. And what you see on film is basically what they did at Colorado State. They give you a lot of different formations and (present) different kinds of problems with the number of ways they do things on offense. They throw it well, they run it well, all those kind of things. On defense, they're strong upfront, their front seven is strong and stout and, you know, it'll be hard for us to run the ball. So I think it's a pretty good matchup."

On whether Central Michigan's recent point explosion is because of the quality of their opponents:

"No, they don't play inferior teams. Obviously, they put in a new system when he got there, and early in the season they were learning how to react in the new system, and the new system got going with good players. They had good players there and they developed them into group that knows their system now and executes very well. That's why they're scoring all those points."

On the team's anticipation of playing in the New Mexico Bowl:

"I think our team is always excited about getting to play another game and since we haven't been there before, I think our team is looking forward to going to a different bowl game and experiencing some different things. We've played a lot of MAC teams, so our players know that the MAC plays good football just like a lot of non-Power 5 leagues do that don't get credit for. But they play good football in that league and they are very physical up front, so I think that our team's excited about going to a new place and doing a new thing."

On what this bowl game means for his players:

"For our players, they get to play another game. They get the excitement of preparing and getting to play another game. When you prepare all year long, you prepare probably 11 out of 12 months a year to play however many games you get to play and (then) you get an extra one. That's exciting to everybody who likes to play. Obviously, we're not going to get to develop our younger guys as much as normal because we're so close to the game. We can't take a chance of getting somebody hurt during a scrimmage or those kind of things. So it's mostly preparing like we do during the season."

On if he wishes his team's defense got to face Boise State's offense in the MW Championship Game:

"Obviously, we wanted to be in that game and we weren't, so you let it go and move on just like you do with everything else in your life."

On how much he wants to win this game after the team's last two bowl appearances:

"I want to win it just like I do every game. It has nothing to do with what's happened in the last couple bowl games. I want to win every game that we play with the same energy and the same everything. There's no special meaning to anything. You lose a game, the very next game is really important and you really want to win it just like you did the one you just lost."

On whether the opportunity to finish with double-digit wins makes this game more special:

"I think that I found out this year that all those outside incentives don't mean a damn thing. When you start throwing a bunch of outside incentives about winning a football game, all you do is add stress and pressure. Some people handle that well, most people do not. Guys who play football at this level, they're playing because they like to play football and if you let them play, guess what, they play better instead of throwing all those outside incentives in their face every day."

On giving pregame speeches to motivate players:

"I don't give them pregame speeches. You've heard this before. Preparation for a football game does not happen 30 minutes before you kick it off. It starts on Monday, goes all the way until Saturday and then you go out and play. A pregame speech might rile them up until they get hit. Once they get hit, that pregame speech goes right out the window, so why give one. That's a waste of time."

On whether he gets emotional for the senior class:

"I always miss the seniors. Obviously, you have a lot of fond memories with them if they've been in your program for a long time. We've had a lot of success around here and a lot of it has to do with inner team leadership. The way we set this up is our seniors are our leaders. And this group of seniors, I don't know how many will get a chance to play in the NFL, but not very many. This group of seniors did a great job of leading this group from January of last year until now, so they've done a great job. Yeah, we'll miss them, but it's time for them to move on to the next stage of their life, too."

On if there's something special for some of the seniors knowing that this will be their last football game ever:

"There are two things because I can still remember, and it was a long time ago. Number one, you're excited about what the future might hold for you and number two, most of these guys have been playing some form of football since they were 8 to 10 years old, so it's been part of their life for a long, long time. And I don't know when it will hit them, it might hit them before they start playing the game, but it's sure hits somewhere during the game that this is the last time I'll be out here with the helmet on, and I think it's a little sad. I mean, I know I was sad. When the coach pulled me out and told me I was done for the day, it hits you hard that you're never going to be in that situation again."

On some concerns during the long layoff between games:

"If you get lazy and rusty. I don't think this group will let themselves be lazy. Now, how sharp we are when the game actually starts, that'll be the real question because nothing moves in practice as fast as it does in the game. So the speed of the game becomes a problem if you haven't played for a few weeks. Now, they played last week, so they won't be as far removed as we are."

On if bowl week preparation will be different for both teams:

No, that's pretty much the same for both teams. I mean, it's just like a game for us the way we're preparing. We're not doing any of the extra stuff for the sake of the program because we don't have enough time. The activities, both teams are doing that ... I would say they're not as experienced at it as we are since they were 1-11 last year now all of a sudden this year they're playing for the (MAC) championship and a bowl game. We're kind of experienced about going to bowl games, but every team's

personality allows them to play a certain way. I mean let's be honest, last year we went to a bowl game and those guys decided they didn't want to play. I'd be shocked if this group did that."

On if he was surprised by last season's performance in the Frisco Bowl:

"I'm not surprised because you never know how they're going to play. You never know. You can throw all those outside incentives up at 'em and stuff, and you still don't know how they're going to play. You can watch them practice and say those are the best. I heard (SDSU men's basketball head coach Brian Dutcher) say this after the basketball game about how they had two great practices (before Sunday's win). Well, I've seen a team have as good a practice as I've ever seen and then flop on game day. And I've seen teams that practice horribly, you know you're going to get killed on game day, and they play as good as they've ever played. You have no idea how they're going to play. I'll be surprised if this group doesn't play good though."

On how rewarding it's been to coach this team after the way last season finished:

"I'm proud of the way the seniors led this group from the time we got back for second semester of last year, whatever that was in January, and how they've worked to this point. I'm proud of that group that has led this team in that direction."

On wide receiver Jesse Matthews earning a scholarship after starting as a walk-on:

"We're not in to 'look at me' in our program, but he obviously deserved one, and one of the guys that was in our program got a medical (redshirt) approved, so that allowed a scholarship to be available. And as soon as it was available, we gave it to him because he deserves it. I couldn't see (his reaction) because how the rest of the team reacted. I was afraid they were going to hurt him, but he came out of the room okay...I'm not kidding, I could not see him. But when the seniors were reading the announcement, because all the seniors got in front of the team and read the announcement that he was being put on scholarship, everybody knew who they were talking about. So I think he probably was pretty emotional about it. His teammates were as happy as I've ever seen a team about it."

On what he thinks New Mexico has to offer on the bowl trip:

"Well, I have I have some special feelings about New Mexico. I think New Mexico has a lot to offer. I love the place, I love the people there, I love the culture. I don't know how many of our fans will actually travel with us. The real good Aztec fans, they're going to be cut in half. Hopefully, we get half, but our basketball team plays that same night in a kind of highfalutin tournament, so I would guess not very many of them are going with us. So that's kind of sad that they can't do both, but that's the way it worked out, so you live with that and go on about your business."

"Yeah, it's a really special feeling for me, and I'm trying to make sure our team knows what a special place in New Mexico is. It really is a special place, but that's not why. I have personal feelings because of what that state and that school did for me. They're the only ones that offered me a scholarship. So if they're the only ones that think you're good, you kind of have a special feeling for them."

On the four-game redshirt rule:

"Well, it's about time they started coming around to my thinking. I had the answer to this problem a long time ago and I keep putting it out there and they don't seem to be jumping on it, so they must not think it's worth a darn. If you're going to put a guy on scholarship and a normal student, which happens, normal students take more than four years to graduate usually for all kinds of reasons. So they're here not only play football, they're here to get a college degree. So if you're going to take a little bit more than four years to get a college degree, which is average, give them five years. And why have any restrictions on how much they can play or when they can play. Give them a five-year scholarship, they can play for five years. After five years, they're done. No injury waivers, no special deals, no redshirt, no nothing. Give them five years to play, you know, it doesn't matter if they play or not. They got five years. Sounds like a real simple answer to me."

Junior center Keith Ismael

On if there is any reward to finishing with 10 wins after the disappointing season last year:

"Yeah, last season was to say the least disappointing and we had a goal after that ball game to get the program back on track. And while we didn't have an opportunity to make the championship, we won a lot of games this year. This is one of the closest teams I've been around and the brotherhood is real and the passion is real. I think we did a pretty good job (this season)."

On what changed this year from last year:

"The chemistry and culture. It all starts in the locker room. (Strength and conditioning) coach (Adam) Hall always pushes us hard every year. It's just how you respond to that. We went into the offseason with a goal to Win 22, but it's still the goal for next year as well, unfortunately. But it was all about our mindset. The upperclassmen on this team, we had a task to get the message to resonate from the top to the bottom and I think everybody received it well. We all put in the work the paid off for the most part."

On wide receiver Jesse Matthews earning a scholarship on Monday:

"It was a great moment for the team. Jesse's one of our key offensive players. He works his butt off every single day. And so when they announced (the scholarship), we all kind of ganged up around him and started a little chant. And he had his head in his hands and was just was crying tears of joy. I would be too. It was a great opportunity for that kid."

On what it means to see San Diego State keep winning despite not getting the blue-chip recruits:

"It gives us an edge. I feel like we get the right guys in here that are willing to work and who are tough. We compete every day, every week. That's why we've been so successful against Power 5 schools because we have that little chip on our shoulder, a little attitude. It takes a certain type of person to be in this culture of this team and Coach Long sets that precedent. You see it straight from the recruiting trip. (The coaching staff) lets you know what you're getting into."

On if there is less pressure playing in a bowl game compared to a regular season game:

"I'd say no. The pressure is still on. It's business, it's a game. We have a goal to win 10 games. Not many teams in the country will have (10 wins). The pressure is still on just like it has been the whole season. Every game no matter what it is. Even after the heartbreaking loss to Hawai'i, we finished out the season strong against BYU. (We want to) finish out the season strong against Central Michigan."

On if there is any more motivation to win this year's bowl game after losing the last two:

"I think that's all the motivation we need. We haven't won a bowl game the last two years, so we want to win the trophy and this is our championship. We're going to go out there and hopefully handle business."

On the focus of the offense heading into bowl preparation:

"Right now at bowl practice we're just working on basic fundamentals, trying to fine-tune things here in the last week. They're a classic MAC team. They're always going to come in and play hard just like all the teams that we've played the past couple years. Whether it was Eastern Michigan or Ohio, they are all cut from the same cloth and they're going to be fired up to play us just like we're fired up to play them. So we have to come with our best game just like I know there going to come out with there (best game), and it's going to be a good battle. I got faith in my brothers, so we'll see what happens."

On the play of redshirt freshman Carson Baker stepping in for senior Ryan Agnew in the win against BYU:

"I'm extremely proud of Carson. He stepped in when we needed him and he acted like a senior. A couple of times, he is new to the game, he was pressured in certain situations, but he kept his composure the whole game. The upperclassmen that were in the huddle there with him picked him up when he was on the ground and supported him. We had his back the whole time and he delivered. I'm excited for his future."

On if he could tell he was nervous:

"No. He handled it like a veteran."

Senior defensive back Luq Barcoo

On if there is any reward to finishing with 10 wins after the disappointing season last year:

"I agree with (Keith). I feel like after last year things didn't end the way we wanted to and we definitely had a goal to turn things around this season. I think we did a great job as seniors leading the team. I think the coaches did a great job of getting their message across to us so that we could turn it around and get closer as a team. Just play harder, stronger and faster like we did and I think we did a great job this year. Unfortunately, we didn't win the championship, but it doesn't always work out how you wanted to. But we did a lot better than we did last year and I felt like that's what the goal is."

On wide receiver Jesse Matthews earning a scholarship on Monday:

"Jesse (Matthews) earned a scholarship. He's a great player and I definitely feel that he deserves that scholarship. I've seen him transition and develop since he's been here and he's turned into a great player. So I have a lot of respect for Jesse. I'm excited that he got the opportunity to get a scholarship."

On what it's like for a guy like Jesse to come to campus without a scholarship and to work to get one:

"For me it's very inspirational because I come from a junior college and I was kind of in a similar situation where I had to kind of earn my scholarship. I didn't get it right off the bat. So I know how hard it is. I know how mentally tough it can be but I find inspiration from seeing someone like that do that. It's huge to me. Like I said, I've got a lot of respect for him for doing that."

On what he sees from Jesse going against him in practice every single day:

"He's just a tough competitor no matter what. You can have this guy fully covered and if the ball comes his way he has opportunity to catch it he's going to catch it 10 out of 10 times. And if he doesn't catch he's going to be super upset. It could be the worst thrown ball or the most awkward incredible catch he'd have to make and if he doesn't catch it, he's going to be disappointed. That's one of the biggest things I see out of Jesse that kind of shocks me from somebody."

On what it means to see San Diego State keep winning, despite not getting the blue-chip recruits:

"It's all about getting the right guys that you bring in. I actually like a lot better this way because it's not about the hype of the big guy. Five-star and four-star guys coming in might not think they have to work as hard and from the start when you come here, they let you know that it's not going to be like that no matter who you are. You are going to put in the same work that everybody else is and if you're not you're going to get weeded out. That's what I like about this coaching staff. I have a lot of respect for what Coach Long and the rest of the coaching staff does here to develop their culture."

On if his great individual season has sunk in yet:

"I'm actually a little disappointed. I left a lot of plays out there on the field that I would wish I'd have another opportunity to get back. But I'm definitely excited that I got the opportunity to make plays to help our team win as many games as possible. I just look forward to competing and going out there in the bowl game, having another opportunity to make more plays to help us win."

On the emotions of playing his final college game on Dec. 21 in the bowl game:

"It's huge. It's been a great experience overall. It hasn't really sunk in yet too much, but it definitely will soon. I'm just I'm just excited that I've got one more opportunity to go through my teammates and do the best I can to help us get another win."

On if he came into the season with a goal of a certain number of interceptions:

"Yeah, because I came in from JUCO and I only had two years. I definitely looked at my senior season like my breakout year to let people know who I am. I definitely accomplished what I wanted to accomplish. I think I put seven interception on my goal sheet. So I got that which is a great feeling being able to put your goals down and accomplish them."

On if that goal number has changed now that he reached it:

"Oh, yeah. (The new goal is) 10. I'll be trying to hopefully get two more."

On if he looked at the Boise State-Hawai'i game and wished that San Diego State could have been there:

"Yeah. We definitely feel like we should have been in that game. But like I said, it doesn't always work out as planned and hopefully we can recuperate. The guys next year can go out there and put us in a situation to play in that championship game."

On if there is any more motivation to win this year's bowl game after losing the last two:

"For sure. I think that our coaches have been doing a great job of eliminating some of the extra things that we do so we could be more focused for this ball game. We have less days to be out there and I think we're doing less events when we get out there. We definitely are a lot more focused on this bowl game than we did in the past. I think that's something that we have to take into consideration, understanding that this game is important, and it is also opportunity for us to reach double digit wins this year. It's big for us."

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