



## **SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS**

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### **Director of Athletics John David Wicker**

#### **Opening Statement:**

"Let's go Aztecs! Thank you to everyone assembled here today joining us for this exciting occasion. Thank you to our band, the cheer and dance teams for the energy that they bring to San Diego State Athletics on a regular basis. Thank you.

Welcome to Bashor field at Snapdragon Stadium for what promises to be a great day for the Aztec nation as we welcome the 19th head coach in Aztec football history, Sean Lewis.

Over the past couple of weeks, we have met, and we've had many conversations with a variety of stakeholders and candidates. The one thing that stands out is that the SDSU head coaching job is one of the top jobs in the country. You have the city of San Diego, the beaches, out east, all the things to do, a brand-new stadium, an ascending academic institution, a history of success on the field and in the classroom and a path to the to the expanded CFP playoff. These things allowed us to compile a great field of candidates. From that group, one candidate stood above the rest, Sean Lewis. I'm excited to have Sean here along with his wife Sarah, son Rory and daughter Kiera and welcome them to the Aztec family.

Sean has a proven track record as an offensive innovator, running an up-tempo offense nicknamed The Flash Fast during his tenure as head coach at Kent State University. He runs a balanced offense that produced nearly identical rushing and passing totals in 2021 of 3425 yards passing and 3482 yards rushing. Both are school records, and you really can't get much more balanced than that. Sean led Kent State to its only bowl win in history and has spent time at several institutions that ran dynamic offenses.

Unfortunately, some of you may remember one of those offenses led by Jimmy Garoppolo during his time at Eastern Illinois. It was Sky Show but there were a lot of fireworks on the field. You got to see right there, Sean Lewis' offense. It's very clear and it was one of our stated goals that that we wanted this type of offensive innovator. We're excited to have someone with this type of influence and history calling San Diego State home.

While improving on the offensive side of the ball is a goal, playing great defense, as the Aztecs had done over the past 15 years, is something that Sean articulated well and understands that's a benchmark of what our program has been. During our discussions with Sean, it was clear that his vision of how to establish a program and culture will fit well within our athletic department. A culture built around hard work, caring for each other and dedication to the holistic development of the student athlete was another stated goal of our search. Something Sean shared that stood out to me was this comment: "By focusing on educating and developing the individuals within the building, we will invest our time and energy where it matters most: our people. We are a human system first and a football system second. The quality of our football system depends on the quality of this human system that drives it. Therefore, we will and always must prioritize our people." That, in a nutshell, encapsulates what Aztec athletics is for me and how we run our department.

The energy that Sean brought to every one of our meetings was another positive attribute that stood out. An energy that will be infectious, not only within the football area, but throughout our department. An energy that will help our football team return to the top of the Mountain West and, with the expansion of the college football playoff, a path to a playoff berth.

I'd like to thank Deputy Director of Athletics Bob Moosbrugger and Daniel Parker with Parker Executive Search, who were with me every step of the way on this search. They did a great job of helping compile a great list of candidates and spend the time that we needed to find the best candidate for San Diego State. Lastly, I'd like to thank President Adela De La Torre for her participation in this search and spending time with the candidates. She is a tireless advocate for the athletic department and understands the value that a winning program on the field and in the classroom can bring our great institution. And with that, I would like to turn it over to President De La Torre."

## **President Adela De La Torre**

### **Opening Statement:**

"Thank you, JD, for your warm introduction. We've come together today for a lot of exciting announcements and in particular, the announcement of this wonderful new football coach. We've had incredible achievements, right here in the new Snapdragon Stadium and in Mission Valley. We've also celebrated on The Mesa the Aztec men's basketball team's historic Final Four run. It was in the same stadium that we joined in the announcement of the MLS team that's coming to San Diego. And now, we're excited for Aztec sports with this historic announcement of Sean Lewis as a new head coach for our Aztec football program. Again, I want to give Sean and his family a round of applause.

In speaking with Sean yesterday, it's clear that he shares the value that our students are truly at the core of all we do. In fact, one of the words he used when he spoke about what he did for students was transformative. That hit my heart right away because we're here to transform the lives of our students. This is not a transactional activity. This is a commitment of the heart. I was so proud of how he responded that I told JD right away, "He's the one." On the field, yes, he's exceptional. He has a dynamic offensive mind and I look forward to see what he will do for our program in terms of recruitment. I also want to take a moment to really thank JD and the team for what they've done. They are an incredibly strong team here in athletics, and the process in which they did this with integrity, with the right values and principles resulted in a national search that has resulted in an exceptional candidate with Sean.

I'm really thrilled, Sean, to be here today to officially welcome you to the Aztec family. I do want to see you energize our fanbase, a fanbase that's made of students, staff, faculty, alums and families. In fact, if you think about it, we're 500,000 alumni who are Aztec proud. With all that said, I would like to introduce our new SDSU Aztec football head coach Sean Lewis."

## **Head Coach Sean Lewis**

### **Opening Statement:**

"Good morning, everyone. It's a pretty exciting day, and I need to say a few thank yous before we dive into the vision and direction that we're about to head as an Aztec family and the excitement that me and my family have to be here on The Mesa and to be a part of this wonderful community. First and foremost, I need to thank President De La Torre for her time in this process and sharing her vision in the university and how this is going to be a great partnership together. Her leadership is truly a difference maker and that was felt in the time yesterday that we spent together. To JD, for your diligence in this process and from the very first conversation, the way that you care for the young men, the student athletes of the department it was evident as something that was really near and dear to my heart, and to my family's. It's our reason why we do all of this. To Bob Moosbrugger, our paths crossed long ago in the MAC and to cross paths again, to be a part of this again, I'm extremely grateful for your support in all of this and our partnership going forward is going to be amazing. I'm really, really looking forward to it. I need to thank all the coaches that believed in me and there's too many to mention, but Coach Dino Babers, who's from San Diego himself, and many years ago, saw something in a really young coach who didn't know a whole heck of a lot but he took a hold of me underneath his arm and stewarded me through this profession and gave me an

opportunity. I wouldn't be here without him. To everyone at Kent State: Joel Nielsen, Randell Richmond, President Beverly Warren and President Tycon there, who all so were supportive of me, of our vision and allowed me to do things the way that we felt was right, to pour into our kids while we were there, to be in front of you all today. I also need to mention all the players, without them and addressing and speaking with the team this morning, I told the players it's about them. It's always going to be about them. It's about the players. And if it wasn't for the Jimmy Garoppolo's, the Eric Laura's, the Matty Jay's, the Gary Dealer's, the Roger Lewis', Dustin Crum and all the kids that believed. Again, there's countless many more that saw the vision that we were trying to lay out, bought into it and ran with it and made it their own, put their own style on it, and made the plays in between the white lines. We wouldn't be getting to know one another today. I'm very, very grateful for them. Lastly, for my thank yous, and I apologize for being a little bit long winded with it, but I don't plan on doing this very many more times. Thank you to my family, my parents and my sister. I need to thank them. Family is very, very important to me. As a big part of our conversation as we move through this the Aztec family and being able to intertwine my family, our extended family with the Aztec family here and my parents instilling in me the work ethic, the drive and desire and the belief to say hey, whatever is that you want to go do, go do that and we support you wholeheartedly. I would not be here without them. My sister is an educator and is in teaching, she's an advocate of mine, and she's one of my greatest supporters. She also doesn't know it, but she's one of the people that I lean on quite a bit because she teaches me how to teach. And that's what coaches are. We're just trying to teach them information and pass it along to our young men so that they can have success. Erin, thank you for that. And lastly, I need to thank my wife, Sarah. I get a little emotional but without your support, and everything that we've been through since high school, being high school sweethearts and being on this crazy journey together, we would not be here. You are the rock of our family. Thank you for all that you do. Thank you for being my best friend. And I can't wait to start this adventure with you here. To Kiera and Rory, you guys are everything to me. I can't wait for Rory to be in the facility again, playing PlayStation far longer than you should and for Kiera for you to be running around asking for snacks wherever they may be and stealing my Jolly Ranchers. I love you guys so much. And I can't wait to start this adventure with you guys here on The Mesa.

What a tremendous time, what a tremendous opportunity here in this beautiful facility that represents a really bright future that we have at the current task and at this moment of time for Aztec football. I'm excited to be welcomed and embraced and to lead a tremendous program, a tremendous community that has rich tradition going all the way back to Air Coryell and what he was able to do, how he revolutionized the game of football and how we throw the football today because of his influence and his impact on the game. I'm looking forward to bringing that excitement, that brand of football where we're lighting up the scoreboard, where we're playing fast, where we're being balanced. There is a brand and an energy to what we bring day in and day out when our community and our university and our team thinks of Aztec football. Not to put an emphasis on offense rather than defense because it is about being loyal to winning and playing strategically so that we can have complimentary football. Look at the past 15 years, with what Coach Hoke and Coach Long have built and at the peak ages of the dark side D. I challenged the young men this morning that we're going to expect them to chase excellence in all phases of their life, in the classroom and in their athletic endeavors. And I expect us in the same breath if we expect that excellence in all three phases of them, I expect excellence in all three phases of our football program. That is not just going to be offense. It's not just going to be defense. It's not just going to be special teams. The teams that compete for championships consistently, the way that we are going to, the young men in the way in which they are going to lead their lives, the way that we are going to dominate our rivalries and the way that we are going to dominate the league and play for CFP games and titles year in and year out. We are going to be great in all of those areas. I'm a big believer in knowing who you are and clearly defining that so we can establish the culture that we're going to chase. And it really comes down to three simple things for me and for our program: that I believe victory grows through alignment in unity, that we know who we are, we know who we're going to be and we're going to do that collectively together and alignment and through strength so that we can have deep relationships that start with building up our people that grow to building up those relationships so that we have bonds that when tested, will not be broken. There will be a brotherhood, there will be a connection and there will be a family-like atmosphere to our organization that will be able to withstand any storm that comes and all the greatneses that are going to com. We're going to achieve great things. We know that when great things are achieved, that great opportunities present

themselves. There are also adversities that meet and are near those opportunities. We need to be emotionally, mentally, and physically resilient and have true grit about our program which is again embodied in the culture that has been established here by the previous coaches and players of the past. There is a toughness and resiliency, a physicality to the brand of football that that has been played and we will continue to play. So being unified, being aligned, victory is going to grow from that head and having true grit about who we are and the way we go about our business in all areas of our lives and in between the white lines is going to be a mainstay of who we are. Lastly, we're going to be leaders in the community, we're going to be leaders in the university, we're going to be leaders in the conference, and we're going to be leaders in the college football space. We have an unbelievable venue. We have an unbelievable opportunity to continue to innovate, to continue to grow. From day one today, to talking with the guys, we're going to decide to be champions in all that we do, and we're going to align our work to how we do that. We're excited to build off this tradition, this wonderful tradition and take it to new heights by refining it and making it our own and this Aztec fast style of play. We can go and have a lot of fun in the process of doing it. Thank you."

### **On why he chose San Diego State:**

"I think it is the best group of five job that is available. With the way that the college football world is expanding and improving, there was nowhere else that I wanted to be. As we talked about it as a family and I talked more and more with the leadership team that was here and, weighed out against the other opportunities that were put forth in front of us. There really was no decision to it. This is where we wanted to be. This is where we felt that we could achieve greatness collectively together."

### **On balancing head coaching and offensive duties:**

"I have to be intentional and purposeful with the time and energy that I do have. I think all of us, in whatever our chosen space is, our attention, our time and our energy is a finite resource. Managing my time, being purposeful with the way that we schedule the day so that I can be present in all the areas that I need to be. I'll give clear direction, clear understanding, clear intention of how I want things done and then empowering my staff to go and do it to the best of their abilities. The same thing for the kids. To be able to have the people around you that you trust so that I can manage the game, call plays, and then quickly pivot and do all the other things that are required within the community to generate buzz and to fill the stadium. Fans need to get their tickets now because there's not going to be tickets available very soon with the product that we're going to put on the field. And I'm excited to get rolling with it."

### **On who his biggest influence is:**

"In terms of X's and O's, Coach Babers. When you look at it from a 30,000 foot level and the up tempo style that we play, he's had a remarkable impact on it. I was very fortunate to play football for Chris, play for Coach Alvarez and be around a lot of other great minds. There's some there's still some Badger blood that runs in me. We're still going to run A gap power and have the balance and not just throw it all around because, it's the physicality that you need to have. Coach Babers has had the singular most influence on the way that I've gone about and see the game."

### **On coaching under Deion Sanders:**

"Coach does an unbelievable job of telling the story and of getting unfiltered access. I think that's a beautiful way to tell stories with the uniqueness of the characters that are within our club. The individuals, the people that make up our organization, each of them has a unique story to tell. Coach did an unbelievable job of showcasing that for the university, the team, for that young person to be able to prosper. Coach Sanders does an unbelievable job of speaking belief into existence. There's an unwavering belief in how he does things and the conviction that gave the team as we moved forward. Those two lessons learned were invaluable from our time together. I'm thankful for the opportunities I had with him."

**On the advantages of being a younger coach:**

"A lot has been made about my age and the relatability of that. I can sit down and play PlayStation with a kid and earn a commitment off of that like I've done in the past that maybe others can't. I think the biggest thing is to be adaptable and to be innovative. We entered into this space and we're all still trying to figure out the best way to navigate these waters. Having a team around you that we already have in place within the university and within our building where you challenge people to think outside the box. How can we do this better than anyone else? In a lot of areas around the NIL space and how the portal is being utilized, we're all pretty much on equal footing. We started not too long ago. How can we think differently than other people? If we think about it the same way as them, we're not the innovators that we are here on The Mesa to be able to attack it in a different way. It's more about being willing to adapt and being willing to be innovative. As you move through the process, if you think you have a good idea, being humble enough to go "Okay. That's really working great." Or "We need to pivot here as we move through this." It's obviously a piece of the puzzle. It is right now, and we embrace that and we welcome that so we can put a championship product on the field."

**On what he remembers about coaching against San Diego State in 2013:**

"This place should be the best home field advantage, the best competitive environment in all of college football. This is an intimate venue for our alum, our fanbase. For the Chargers fans who are looking for a team, we're your team. Come on board and come down here so that we can make this place one of the best venues to be, where our fans are going crazy when we're out on defense and drive up the number of false starts for our opponents. Please be quiet while we're working so that we can do our thing. I do remember, back in 2013, the quality of life, the sunshine, the energy, and enthusiasm. Even though it was in a different venue of how passionate the fanbase was and the physical nature, the discipline that team had that we went against. Those are things that as we move forward in this beautiful home and as we refine the brand just a touch, that will still ring true. We're going to be disciplined. We're going to be tough. We're going to be explosive. We're going to have a whole heck of a lot of fun scoring a lot of points and shutting people out and playing a fun and exciting brand of football. Get your tickets. Come on down here. This has exceeded all expectations. Google does not do this justice when you do a Google image search to see how wonderful this is."

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