



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes Thursday, Aug. 15, 2019

Head Coach Rocky Long

Opening statement:

"We've been through 15 practices so far. We're making progress. Not nearly as fast as I would like to make progress, but we're making progress. Hopefully here in the next week, we'll make a lot of progress before we get into game-planning for the first game."

On the Aztec defensive line:

"I think we still have questions. We've had an influx of new guys including a couple of junior college players that are struggling right now with assignments as we require our defensive linemen to do a lot more than they do at most places. So those guys are physically able, but whether they're ready to play or not, they're not. Hopefully they'll be ready to play by the first game. I think that we've had some pleasant surprises up there though. We moved Cam Thomas to nose tackle and he's done a really good job. Keshawn Banks has done a really good job and those two are starting for us. One's a redshirt sophomore (Thomas) and the other one's a true sophomore (Banks)."

On whether there are any local players who are expected to raise their stock this year:

"We have a lot of local players on our team and some of them have already proven that they can play. So you probably won't see them much on Saturday. Probably the one that we're counting on to be the best player for us this year is Matt Araiza. He redshirted last year because John Baron was our kicker. But Matt Araiza has enormous talent. He'll be handling the kickoffs and kicking field goals for us, and he has an extremely strong leg. If he's a consistent guy, he'll make a huge difference. He's our kicker. There's no competition there, so we're counting on him being the guy, the local guy that makes the big jump."

On what intangibles assistant coach Brady Hoke brings to the defensive line:

"Obviously, he's a very experienced coach. I've said it before, I think he's the best defensive line coach ever. So he knows what he's doing and because of his coaching path, the players know that he knows what he's doing. I guess that's an intangible that they know they have a very experienced coach. And he's been in our system before, too, so it's not like he's learning our system along with them. He already knows our system . . . All great coaches know the techniques, they know how to teach the techniques, they know how to motivate. All great coaches do those all those things."

On if there are any freshmen who have caught his attention:

"Out of the new freshman that we have, you can already tell there's at least seven — they're not ready to play yet — but you can just tell by their athletic ability and their attitude that they are going to be really, really good players here someday. It won't be this year,

so there's no reason to talk about it. But just talent-wise coming in as freshmen, I think this is our best recruiting class. There's more of them out there that I believe can be really, really good players than any other freshman class I've had."

Senior quarterback Ryan Agnew

On how much he expects to play in Saturday's scrimmage:

"(The coaching staff) hasn't talked to us about playing time, but Tariq (Thompson) and I going into this want to play every snap to get as much experience as we can before we get out there for Weber State."

On if it feels different going into the season as the starting quarterback:

"Every year is a new year. It's a lot easier coming in being the starting quarterback, but every year is going to be new experiences. (There's) new guys on the team, new guys stepping up and making plays, and new guys becoming star players."

On if making so many seven starts last year makes it more comfortable heading into this season:

"It definitely helps out with the comfort zone. Knowing you've been there before, knowing you've been in those situations. Knowing that you've started in some games and started in some big games. You've started in some wins and also started in some losses. You've been through the up's and the down's. You just try to use that experience and apply it to this season."

On if the preparation is different heading into the season as the starting quarterback:

"I wouldn't say the preparation is any different. Even though I was the backup last year, you still had to come in thinking you were going to start week 1. I guess the only difference this year is the leadership role. All the offense looks at you as the starting quarterback. You have to know what every single player is supposed to do on the field because they might not know exactly. They're going to look to you for some guidance and I just have to be ready to give them all the knowledge I can give them, hopefully point them in the right direction."

On if former quarterback Christian Chapman was a mentor to him and if he is becoming a mentor to the young quarterbacks:

"Christian was a great guy. The first day I came in he introduced himself and talked to me right away. He didn't big-time me because he was older and I was younger. So I try to take those experiences I have with Christian and put it on Jordan (Brookshire), Carson (Baker) and Mark (Salazar), and even Joe (Green) being a really young guy. As much knowledge as I can give to the young guys. When I'm gone, hopefully they can use that and be better in the future."

On getting more big chunk plays this year on offense:

"Big plays is what scores points and chunk plays is what is going to get us in the red zone. It will make it easier for the kicker to make a field goal or potentially get into a touchdown situation. The only way to get better at that is to get athletes in space. Get guys split out wide and let them catch, make one guy miss and take it to the house or take it as far as they can. Also not allowing (the defense) to stack the box and if Juwan (Washington) or Chase (Jasmin) do get a carry, they're not having to run through eight or nine guys and instead just six or seven in the box. The main things are breaking tackles, making great catches and running after the catch, and knowing what we have to do. Our offensive coaches put us in a great situation, we just have to execute."

Junior safety Tariq Thompson

On how much he expects to play in Saturday's scrimmage:

"I always want to take as many reps as possible to get my body ready and my mind mentally ready for a full game, just because we haven't been able to get the same reps (in practice) as a game."

On if it takes a special player to play in Rocky Long's 3-3-5 defense:

"It doesn't take a special player, it takes a smart player. You have to know your assignment. (Coach Long's) main thing is know what to do and know how to do it. It takes time to develop that mental ability to learn your position and learn what you're supposed to do on every single play. There are a lot of adjustments to different things the offense is going to try and throw at you. It's definitely a complex defense."

On if this year's defense could be as fast as it's been in a while:

"I believe we have a lot of speed on the defensive side. I still think that 2016 defense has us beat by speed. They came to the ball with a lot of effort and speed, which we're consistently trying to get to. That's the last year (SDSU) won a (conference) championship. They forced so many turnovers by just having a full-force effort in every play and doing their assignment. That's what we are trying to do right now."

On what will be the trademark of this defense:

"I'm hoping it's turnovers. I'm hoping we force a lot of turnovers this year. We've taken a big step back in turnovers since 2016, so hopefully we can get that (number) back up and become one of the top teams nationally in turnovers (forced)."

On what it's like coming into year three with the defense from an experience standpoint:

"I feel like a leader now because I have a lot of experience under my belt. I can help the young guys out. If any young guys come to me with questions, I'm willing to answer. I'm willing to tell them what it's like. I'm willing to help them with whatever they need – school, life adjustments, being far away from home. I can comfort my teammates in that kind of way."

On if he is a vocal leader or a lead by example guy:

"I'm not a vocal leader yet. I'm trying to get there. I'm more of a lead by example kind of guy. I just don't have a really big voice yet, but that's something I'm trying to get better at as the season goes on."

On if he'd rather make an interception or a big tackle:

"Interceptions. Turnovers are my favorite thing to try and get on the field. Any time you can get the ball back and give it back to our offense, that's my favorite play because the more points you score the better chance you have of winning. But if we shut (the opponent) out by making tackles then I'm happy with that as well."

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