



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

5500 CAMPANILE DRIVE, SAN DIEGO, CA 92182 | (619) 594-5547

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### San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes Tuesday, Oct. 16, 2018

#### **Head Coach Rocky Long**

##### **Opening statement:**

"We're looking at another conference game this week and as everybody knows, we think conference games are more important than the non-conference games because we're trying to get to a position where we might be able to play for a championship. We're playing San José State, which has struggled to this point but when you watch all the films, they have some quality athletes that in the six games (have given them) a decent to really, really good chance of winning three of the six. So the record is not necessarily indicative of what kind of football team they are. So we're going to have to prepare well and we're going to have to play well to win the game."

##### **On SJSU's kickoff return unit and returner Thai Cottrell:**

"They do a nice job. I mean, he's good with the ball in his hand, but they also do a nice job blocking for him. I mean, they have a really good scheme and they execute it really well."

##### **On if he evaluates high school recruits on if they're good fit into his special teams:**

"Most of the guys that we recruit out of high school other than being return guys—a lot of them are return guys because of their skill—most of the guys we're recruiting aren't playing special teams in high school. So to evaluate a player for special teams, he's got to be a quality athlete that doesn't mind contact because (in) most special teams play, you have to be an athlete where you can run fast enough to cover, you have to be physical enough to get off of blocks or avoid blocks and then you've got to be willing to tackle somebody. And then when you're on the coverage teams or when you're on the kicking teams, obviously you have to do some things as block and get in the right position to allow the return man to maybe have some progress. So you look for really good athletes that don't mind contact to be on special teams."

##### **On whether he has to sell his guys on playing special teams:**

"No, I think it's a team attitude. I think some guys like to play no matter what and so they're looking to be on every special team as well as play on offense or defense. And then there are some other guys that have to realize how important it is. Now we have some starters on our special teams. So if you have a good team spirit, then they're willing to do it because they know important it is to any success you might have."

##### **On if special teams change the flow of a game more so now than 5-10 years ago:**

"I don't know about more, but special teams can win or lose you a game for sure. I mean, we've won a game this year because we had a real good field goal kicker. We've come close to losing a couple of game because we can't catch a punt. Then last week after a safety, we couldn't cover a kickoff and the other team (Air Force) got great field position. So special teams are vital to any success or lack of success you have."

**On whether special teams got as much attention from a coaching standpoint 10-20 years ago:**

"I think it probably did get just as much attention, but people have been more educated on how important it is to the winning and losing of a game. I think that is due to you guys, I think that's due to the media. The media started to realize how important teams were to winning and losing and all of a sudden everybody found out how important it was. But I think coaches all along have known how important it was.

"As a player, now I played a long, long time ago, I think we spent as much time on special teams back when I played as we do know."

**On the status of running backs Chase Jasmin and Juwan Washington:**

"I think he's (Jasmin) going to play this week. I think he's in the fourth day of perceived concussion. He has no symptoms or anything, but we have a policy, and I can't tell you what the policy is, but we have a policy to follow when they think that one of our players has had a concussion. If nothing has changed, he's going to be cleared to practice full-speed tomorrow.

"Juwan is still on the same time frame. They think he'll be ready to play in three weeks."

**On the status of quarterback Christian Chapman:**

"I think Christian will go only in a (real) emergency situation. He is practicing, but he's practicing in a limited role. I mean, he's not doing anything where somebody could bump into him or someone could tackle him or anything like that. And he's getting better. But you can tell he's not moving around like he would normally and until he can protect himself, we're not going to put him out there."

**On the difficulty of turning around a college athletic program, especially football:**

"I think changing an athletic program depends on the number of participants. I think the fewer the participants, the quicker it can be turned around. In other words, if you only have 12 guys on your team, it can be turned around overnight with one recruiting class. If you have a 100 and some players on your team and 60 to 70 of them play in a game, it takes you four or five years to turn a program around because you're installing a different offense, installing a different defense, a different attitude and recruiting players. So I think that it purely depends on the number of participants in the sport on how quickly you can turn a program around.

"I think it can be done. I think there are some places that are harder than others to turn the program around and so it has to be the right guy at the right time, which is sad to say. But he has to be given enough time to do it and that's not the way it is being handled nowadays."

**On whether his staff focuses on just one of SJSU's games in preparation for this week:**

"Well number one, as coaches we don't focus on any one game, we focus on all the games when we try to put a game plan together. When you focus on all the games, you realize that they have quality players. They have a good scheme, which means they have good coaches, and there are times that they look really good on the field and there are times they're not. But guess what, we do that too. We look really good on the field sometimes and we don't look good at times. The trick of the matter is that your team gets ready to play, that they want to get better every week and they work hard in practice and they want to play. That's the trick because every week there are upsets. I see every week where someone's a 20- or 25-point favorite and they get beat. That happens in college because it's emotional as well as physical. You might lose a good player or two that makes you not near as good a team as you were the week before, or it might be just the right day for that team to play really, really good and the other team doesn't play so well. That's what makes college football more fun than pro football."

**On getting blue-chip or better players to commit to a down program:**

"Number one, you're not going to get blue-chippers because there will be advice to go other places. It's up to the coaching staff to evaluate players that can be developed into blue-chippers. So it's all about evaluation because there are a lot of kids out there who are playing football out there that are going to be really, really good college football players. You just can't tell that right now because maybe they're a little too small or they play on a bad high school team and you can't tell what they're going to be four or five years from now. Once you evaluate, if you get good enough athletes, it's about developing those athletes into quality players. It's not an exact science, though. You've got to get lucky in some cases."

**On what the players learned from the Air Force game:**

"I think the players learned that if they keep playing hard and keep trying that there's always a chance to win."

**On the biggest challenges the Aztecs will face this week against SJSU:**

"There are two things I see. Number one, it's hard for defensive kids to switch from one scheme to a different scheme back to the same scheme. In a four- or five-day practice schedule, it's hard to go from a 50-50 team (Boise State), which runs the ball and throws the ball really good to a wishbone or triple-option team (Air Force) that runs it about 80 percent of the time and it's a completely different scheme. Now you're going (against) a complete spread team that wants to throw it all over the ballpark. I think that's really difficult. On offense, I think that we've got to get back to the point (where) we can run the ball successfully and keep it away from the other team because we haven't done that very well in the last couple of weeks. Now, our quarterback and some of our receivers have made big enough plays that they've kept us in the game and we've had a chance to win, so our offense is doing good things to help us win, but our success around here is based on controlling the ball and being able to run it and we haven't done that successfully the last couple of weeks."

**On coaching in his 100th game at SDSU this Saturday and what his most memorable game has been here:**

"I don't look at those kinds of things. I will someday probably, but I don't look at that stuff. I didn't even know it was my 100th game until someone told me yesterday. I guess it means I have some longevity, right?"

**Senior offensive lineman Ryan Pope**

**On preparing to face a winless San José State team this Saturday:**

"We take into account that they still have great athletes and that they're still a good team. A lot of the teams that they have played this year, a lot of the games, were very close. They compete. We're not taking them lightly. It's motivation every week to just stay focused and take care of our business."

**On the ability to re-assert the running game:**

"It's a mindset. Just being physical and coming off the ball. They're going to load the box anyway, they've been doing it for years. It's just a mindset, just hit them as hard as you can."

**On whether or not the running game has regressed:**

"Like I said, it's a mentality. Just as long as we come to work. Honestly, we've become lackadaisical just a tiny bit, but it's about focusing on it and getting it right in practice and just having it carry over."

**On comparing quarterbacks Ryan Agnew and Christian Chapman:**

"Agnew knows how to extend plays, so it's helpful. But it's all the same. They're both smart. They're both great quarterbacks, so I wouldn't trade them for anybody honestly. Those are my guys honestly."

**On being able to plug in players on offense and still be successful:**

"It's all in the off-season. We're just trained like that. It's always next man up. I'm sure you guys have heard that. It's all mental literally. It's just mental toughness. Once somebody goes down, you can't just wish them back. You just have to keep it going; it's next man up. Accountability is a big thing on our team, so everybody takes it into consideration."

**On how accountability on the field helps in life off the field:**

"A lot. Our team is young, but we're pretty mature. Everything that we've been through, with the workouts and just everything else that we go through, it's helped us become men. This program is great, honestly, I wouldn't trade it."

**On the responsibility as seniors to set an example:**

"We spent the most time here, so we have the most time invested. The younger guys do a pretty good job of taking into account that we are the older people and they look up to us. We're the voice in the locker room so what we say carries over. We make sure to carry ourselves in the right way as seniors."

**Junior linebacker Troy Cassidy**

**On preparing to face a winless San José State team this Saturday:**

"Just from watching a little bit of film on them yesterday, we saw they have a lot of good athletes especially in the receiver positions. One of their guys, number 22, Thai Cottrell, I remember playing him in high school and he was one of the best players I ever played against in high school. They definitely have a lot of athletes and they're trying to get that first win, so need to stay focused against them."

**On what made SJSU's Thai Cottrell a good player in high school:**

"They just knew how to get him the ball from the slot and he was just a really shifty player. He's good at staying on his feet; he has great balance and coordination and he's just really quick in an open space."

**On what playing special teams means to SDSU:**

"I feel like a lot of our guys, especially our young guys, they take pride in just helping out the team in any way they can. Kaelin Himpfll last week got Special Teams Player of the Week for the Mountain West after a big punt block. I think he takes a lot of pride in that and then other guys see that and they build off that. Seeing our team win week by week has just helped everyone come together and we're building a lot of chemistry, I think. We're looking good."

**On his own experience playing special teams:**

"My freshman year, I came in and they said after the bye-week they think I have the ability to play on the defense and I was like I came here just to help the team win, so wherever I can play. So I started playing special teams and by the end of the year I was starting on every special team. I just feel like it gives me more confidence coming in to play and start. A lot of our guys just want to help the team win."

**On how accountability on the field helps in life off the field:**

"I think Coach (Adam) Hall does a great job developing us as young players and developing us as men, too. I mean, we spend most of our time with him during the off-season. I think we learn from him and we relate a lot of the stuff he teaches us to outside of football and just to life., like to treat people with respect. He's done a lot for this program, for sure."