



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

Oct. 12, 2021

Head Coach Brady Hoke

Opening statement:

"We're continuing to try and get better with everything we are doing as a football team. We've had good practices this week. We've got a tough opponent, the reigning champs in the Mountain West Conference who have a very talented and very good football team. They've struggled just a little bit on the road, but at home, and this is their Homecoming (game), they've played very well. We've got to play a lot better than we did last week. We've practiced well so we have to play that way on Saturday."

On which defensive statistic is the most important in his mind:

"Scoring defense, keeping them out of the end zone. That's one of the things we want to be very good at and the red zone. I still believe and the coaches do too in stopping the run, making people hurt you one way."

On San José State's defensive line:

"I think they've got a really good defensive line. They're fun to watch. They're very active, they're very physical. They're tough and we've got our hands full."

On watching film from last year's game over the final 12 minutes:

"It wasn't any fun, I guarantee you that. Anytime we're playing an opponent that we played the year before or two years before we're going to look at that film. We're going to critique it. We're going to look at what we did and how we did it. From a defensive standpoint, were we a three-man front, were we a four-man front? Just the different things that you look at to see how people attack you. Last year, the last 12 minutes we're fun for anybody."

On San Jose State tight end Derrick Deese Jr.:

"He's one of the really good tight ends in the league. I think we have one in Dan (Daniel Bellinger). I know Nevada's got a tight end that is pretty doggone good. But you look at Deese and he's very talented. He's really good either in line or on the line of scrimmage or out in double situations. He's got good releases and he catches the ball really well. He runs good routes. We have to make sure we know where he is when we take very snap."

On if there is anything unique in SDSU's defense this season:

"I think the biggest thing is we've got some really good leadership and we've got some guys who have played a lot of snaps. You look at Trenton Thompson, Tayler Hawkins, Caden McDonald and (Seyddrick Lakalaka), and then the three guys up front (Keshawn Banks, Jonah Tavai and Cameron Thomas). They played a lot of football. They're a group that understands there's a

demeanor that we're going to play with that we all are going to know what we have to do, and we're going to do it in our best fashion and playing hard."

On San Diego State now allowing a rushing touchdown this season:

"I didn't even know that to be honest with you. The only thing I can say is our guys are playing hard and that's the biggest thing. That's what they're judged on. We can talk fundamentals, technique and scheme, and all that doesn't matter. It's how hard they play. If they're going to play hard and they're going to play physical, then we're going to a pretty good defense."

On if Matt Araiza has a future in the NFL:

"As a punter, I would think so. He's a heck of an athlete. He's not just the guy who's a kicker/punter. He's really a guy that likes to go down and make tackles, and does all that kind of stuff. I would like for him to maybe not make as many tackles but he's got nice leadership about him and obviously he is very talented."

On Ariaza having three tackles against Utah last month with full-contact hits:

"I loved it. He's an Aztec. He understands the toughness in how we have to play."

On which quarterback they expect to see on Friday:

"We'll be prepared for both of them (Nick Nash and Nick Starkel). Both of them are very good football players. They're different to some degree but I don't know how healthy Starkel is and I don't know if we'll find out how healthy he is. But he's a little bit more pro-style. He does have the ability to run. Obviously Nick Nash last year was a little bit of a nightmare for us. We will keep working on both of them."

On what it would mean to become bowl eligible with a win on Friday:

"I really don't think about that. I don't talk about that. We've got to win every day for us to be the kind of football team that we potentially could be because I really do like our football team. We've got to worry about us every day getting them better and improving on everything we're doing. Everything we've done this week. It's a short week but we've always included the fundamentals what we need at each position. Those are the things that we can work on every day."

Senior linebacker Caden McDonald

On San Diego State now allowing a rushing touchdown this season:

"On the line of scrimmage we really pride ourselves resetting the line of scrimmage in the front four, including the linebackers behind us. That is something our defense has already prided ourselves on is stopping the run. We don't want anyone to run on us, but it takes 11 guys that want to run to the ball and tackle a guy with the ball with full effort. That's what it takes, all 11 dudes because we have times where the safeties have to come down and fill the run because they've got the box loaded. Our safeties even come down and hammer the run, which is really nice."

On Matt Araiza's toughness:

"Matt's on the defense. We claim him on the defensive side. And he's a true weapon to our team to be able to flip the field every single time we have to punt. We don't like to punt, but when we do we know we're in good hands because Matt's going to punt it like 60 yards and going to run down and tackle them. They won't get a net over 40 yards in their punt. But putting them back inside their 20 and him flying down and making tackles adds energy to the whole team. I don't know in many teams in the country could say that their punter is leading their team in special teams tackles this year but he truly is a weapon to our team, and we really appreciate all he does for the defense and offense."

On San José State's two quarterbacks:

"They're both great athletes. Nick Starkel, he's from the Forth Worth (Texas) area, kind of where I'm from. I've known him since high school. He's a great pocket passing quarterback and also is mobile with his legs. He can put it in the tightest windows. He's a legit quarterback. I don't know if he'll be back this week. But Nick Nash is also a great quarterback as well, a dual threat who can really move the ball well on his feet and in the air. They're both great quarterbacks. We're going to game plan for both of them and have a plan to stop both of them."

On looking back at last year's tough loss in Carson to San José State:

"We've kind of had this game circled on our calendars. San Jose State, that put a bad taste in our mouth as the reigning conference champs. That's the goal we have every year is to be conference champions and they took that from us, and ran all over our field and celebrated in our faces because they won and beat us at our place. That hurt us a little bit and hurt our pride a little bit. We want to get back at them, and definitely try to take their will and beat them this year."

On playing on a Friday as opposed to a Saturday:

"This team is such a mature team that we all treat ourselves like professionals and treat every day with a professional business approach. The day of the week we play doesn't really matter. We come to work every day, practiced, focused (and) locked in. No matter what day it is, no matter what time we're playing in the day, this team is very mature and handles every situation or adversity well. Being part of a mature team with the older group really helps a lot when you get these kind of weird (Friday games) popping up like this."

On the standard set by the defense:

"We can still improve. We got points scored on us so that's not good enough for us. We hold ourselves to the highest standard. We want to be No. 1 in every single defensive ranking category and if we're not there's definitely room for improvement there. As soon as we are ranked No. 1 in every category then I'd say our expectations are met. But right now we've got teams scoring on us and that's not good enough for us. We want to hold every team to zero points on the scoreboard and we don't want them to run the ball. We want to force them to throw it in the air so we can get after the quarterback a little bit."

Senior center Alama Uluave**On being able to run the ball so well this year:**

"One thing that I would credit our success to is definitely the running backs. They put a lot of pressure on us to finish our blocks, open holes (and) score touchdowns. One thing that (offensive coordinator Jeff Hecklinski) likes to emphasize is to score fast, score quick and that's really what we've been trying to do as an o-line. We've been really pushing ourselves to be the best unit in the Mountain West."

On pass protection and only allowing six sacks all season:

"It's definitely something we pride ourselves in. We work on it every day. We talk about it. We watch film. We're looking at defensive schemes and blitz twists. We just try to break it down and simplify for the o-line and we do what we do."

On blocking for three different quarterbacks so far this year:

"I'm really confident and comfortable with both QBs. It really doesn't matter who's hands are between my legs and who's taking the snaps, but as an o-line we just execute our job and try the best that we can."

On what it's like blocking for a special group of running backs:

"We love our running backs. We pride ourselves in getting them touchdowns and their glory is our glory. I take full credit for all the rushing yards and all the rushing touchdowns that we get. It's something I pride myself in and I'm sure my brothers do too."

On more of an emphasis on winning a conference championship than making a bowl game:

"I think San Diego State just has a history of going to bowl games and really it's just another game. At the end of the season it's just more opportunities for us to play football. More opportunities for us to show the nation what we can do. It's really just a game for fun. We will play as hard as we can, but we're focusing on winning the conference championship."

On looking back at last year's tough loss in Carson to San José State:

"That game has burned in our mind. We've been looking forward to (playing San José State) since the day after we lost last year. We've had this game circled on our calendar too. Not only as a team, but personally as a o-line. We didn't do good enough last year and we're looking to make up for it (on Friday)."

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