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San Diego State at Utah State Postgame Quotes

Utah State 64, San Diego State 59

Dee Glen Smith Spectrum | Logan, Utah | Jan. 16, 2021

San Diego State Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"(This is) a disappointing loss, but with that being said, I like the toughness and grit of this team. Without Matt Mitchell, we came out and we fought hard. In one day, we adjusted our attitude offensively. We wanted to play downhill, we wanted to attack more, not be so cautious and I think we did that. Lamont Butler, Terrell Gomez, and Trey Pulliam got downhill and that benefited (us) from an offensive standpoint. Obviously, we have to shoot free throws better. In a close game, we have to make our free throws. (We were) 7-for-15 from the foul line. They were 19-for-25. So, they shot two free throws in the first game and shot 25 (in this game). That's a credit to them finding a way to the foul line. I think, the difference in the game was, and it's every time we play (Utah State), rebounding. It's a real critical part of the game, (as well as) their second chance opportunities, which were really important for them to win the game. We didn't do a good enough job keeping them off the glass and getting important rebounds. But with all that being said, (we are) making progress. The Aztecs are getting better and I told (the team) our best basketball ahead of us. We have to believe that. We have to keep practicing hard and getting better every day and that's what we're going to do."

On the preparation for this game without Matt Mitchell:

"You know whether Matt was playing or not we just felt, after game one, we had to be more aggressive. And I think we were. I think Terrell was in attack mode most of the game. Lamont did a great job attacking. And instead of trying to run a ton of ball screens on the fast break, we tried to get downhill and did a good job of that on a one-day prep. This team wants to please the coaches, they want to get better, and I think we did that tonight, even in defeat."

On the play of Lamont Butler:

"A lot of times, as freshmen, you make a mistake and your leash is shorter, you don't get to play through a lot of mistakes, but we know Lamont is good. We're excited to have him in the program, and so we let him play through some mistakes early in the game and (get) a little bit of rhythm about him. I think that bodes well for all of us moving forward; for Lamont and for the team."

On Nathan Mensah and Joshua Tomaic playing together:

"I was pleased with them in there together. Nathan couldn't go that long or we might have played them together in the second half. But out of necessity, we couldn't do that. We had a play Keshad (Johnson), we had to play (Aguek Arop) and we couldn't play that big lineup. I think as they play more together, they're going to be dangerous like last year when we played Yanni (Wetzell) and Nathan together. We're nowhere near where we need to be. We're still, as a coaching staff, finding out what our strengths are and what we have to play to. And that's a continuing process with us. That's one thing we've always been able to do at San Diego State, get better as the season goes on. So, we have to continue to find what works best for us and play our best basketball moving forward."

On if a close loss early in the season will benefit the team later in the year:

"Obviously, I'd rather learn in victory than learn in defeat, but you can learn in both. When we win games, we don't just go back and say we have all the answers. We try to find things to get better at. Obviously, defeat is a lot more shocking, but we can't say that we're heading down the wrong path and everything's broken. No, that's not the case at all. We played two really competitive games here. The first game, even though we didn't

score well, I thought our defense was as good as it was all year, and today I thought the difference was our defense was good, but we didn't reward ourselves with rebounding the ball. That's what Utah State does, they rebound the ball. So, we have to grow, both in victory and defeat."

San Diego State Senior Guard Jordan Schakel

On the benefit of competing in close games, especially early in the season and how that can help later in the year:

"I think there's a lot of benefit. We we're talking about in the locker room, especially last year there were a lot of blowout games and they started getting closer down the (stretch). We like to have games like this early in the year if you're going to have them at all. These teams were very evenly matched. It's just a big learning experience, especially without Matt (Mitchell). A lot of guys stepped up today and that is great for their confidence and great for us moving forward."

On the play of Lamont Butler and the bench:

"Lamont played amazing. Just his aggressiveness was exactly what the coaches (have been) wanting from us. That was the big adjustment that we made. Lamont was a spark in the first half and the second half. He closed the game extremely well and got (Neemias) Queta fouled out of the game. He just played great on both sides of the ball. I couldn't be prouder for him, Also, Keshad stepped up and gave us great minutes on both sides of the ball and so did Joshua (Tomaic) with Nate out."

On the team's mindset heading into the game and dealing with such adversity:

"I don't think this team shies away from adversity; it embraces it. It didn't bother us. It gave us fuel, to be honest. You saw the start we had and that's just who we are."

San Diego State Freshman Guard Lamont Butler

On if he played freer today knowing that he would probably get more minutes:

"You know I just try to stay ready, and just try to bring a spark to the court with my defensive and attacking the rim on offense. So, I'm just staying ready. I've been working a lot, so whenever the opportunity comes, I'm ready. It's no different playing short (minutes) or playing for a long time. I feel like I earned that position today and helped our team."

On the adjustment he has had to make from high school to college:

"It's a big difference right. I'm just working on concentrating on the rim, playing off two feet, getting them (defenders) in the air and just getting buckets downhill. It's a big (adjustment), but I think I'm ready for it."

On his feeling on having a breakout game and how it benefits him moving forward:

"It was great. I've been working so hard so I knew I could do this. It was a good feeling to go out there and play my hardest and to be able to help the team. But I really wanted to win. We didn't get that done so it's back to work the next time we get into the gym."

"It boosts my confidence and just allows me to stay confident and keep attacking and helping team out, however I can, especially defensively. I feel like I'm a great defender. So as long as I keep doing that, impacting the game on that end then offense is going to come, I know that. I've been working. I've been working too hard for it not to, and I will just stay ready and keep going."

San Diego State Senior Forward Matt Mitchell

On if the team took a step forward today despite the loss:

"Definitely. I think in a loss, you find it hard to kind of find a positive, but today our bench showed huge growth. (There were) big time defensive efforts by Lamont. Keshad came in and gave us a few minutes and played hard on the defensive end. And so, these (young guys) coming off the bench, like I said at the beginning of the year, I have confidence in them to get it done, one through 15. Today we just fell a little bit short. They did it without me, and I can be nothing but happy and proud of my team for fighting, especially with a man down. So, I'm proud of my guys for fighting, but definitely disappointed about the loss."

On if the Wyoming game, on Jan. 30, is the target for him to be back playing:

"I believe so. That'd be the target for my return. If I'm 100 percent, I believe the coaches will have no problem with me out there. But we're not rushing any of my rehab right now, not rushing anything. We're taking the right precautions."

On what his rehab will look like for the next couple of weeks:

"So, my work for the next couple weeks (will be) a lot of rehabbing of my quad and working that knee with a lot of compression and ice. It's what I've done since after the game and yesterday, and so I'll do it again before we get on the plane to head back to San Diego. But it'll be a lot of rehab on the quad and just strengthen that leg. I had the meniscus tear before my junior year started, so we'll be working on strengthening that knee and getting it as strong as possible. Utah State did an amazing job helping me get the emergency MRI and making sure they knew what was wrong. So, a big shout out to the medical team at Utah State and a big thanks to them for everything that they did for me. They were on top of everything, so I really, really am grateful for that."

On playing the role of cheerleader and helping the team from the bench:

"It was very different, not something I'm entirely used to. (I've) never missed a game in high school or college. Coming in, I wanted to be the cheerleader for the team, because I couldn't get out on the court and play. So, I had to bring my energy from the bench and let them know that I was here for them and I was here to back them up. No matter what it was, the highs and the lows, staying positive, trying to keep these guys (level) through Utah State's runs. I got to be that guy that that fuels everybody coming in and giving them that confidence to let the ball go."

Utah State Head Coach Craig Smith*

That was a heck of a game. I want to thank our fans, first of all, our fans and administration, everyone who came out today. You could feel the energy in the gym today, they certainly helped will us tonight. San Diego State played really well. We knew they were going to. They're a championship-level team for a reason. They're very good, they play tough and they're tough-minded. I was really proud of how we responded. It was a tale of two halves. The first half got off to a good start, then we were not good in any phase the last 10 minutes. Turnovers were killing us on both ends of the floor. On the offensive end, we had no pace. We looked like we had no direction. We had a deer in the headlights look, and that's a credit to San Diego State. They were very aggressive and took us out of some of our stuff, then they ramped it up another notch. That affected our defense, some of that was catastrophic turnovers where our offense was their best offense. We lost a little bit of our will on the defensive end.

"We addressed that at halftime. I credit our guys to really come together and not blame each other, not point a fin-ger at any teammates or coaches or vice versa. Then we came out on fire in the second half, in the first five minutes we were able to get back that 10-point deficit. We made some big plays down the stretch, shot well from the free throw line and only had four turnovers in the second half of the game. It was a tale of two halves, holding them to 34.5 percent in the second half. We did a lot of great things, and fortunately for us, we were able to find a way to win. It's hard to beat those guys twice. Anytime you can defeat San Diego State, that's a good victory, because they are well-coached and very, very talented."

Utah State Freshman Guard Steven Ashworth*

"Great game today, a great team win. I think that was the definition of a team win, a lot of guys stepping up, a lot of guys making plays. The first half wasn't the first half we anticipated or hoped for, but we came back in the second half with a pretty good response. The crowd really got behind us, it's always great to be in the Spectrum."

** - Utah State quotes are courtesy of the Utah State Aggies media relations office.*