



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State Football Press Conference

Oct. 19, 2021

Head Coach Brady Hoke

Opening statement:

"Last week (at San Jose State) it was a conference game and that's what conference games are like. To win a championship you've got to win tight games. This team has done that twice. They've played together. They've worked hard together. It took all three units to win the game. Defensively, obviously, we played well for most of the game. Our special teams and what Matt Araiza has accomplished to this point, but he would be the first one to tell you that it's not just him because we've had some great coverage. We didn't give up one yard in the special teams last week which says something. And then offensively, it wasn't our best night, but I give a lot of credit to that defensive front at San Jose State. That's a good defensive football team and obviously I think they are a good offensive football team. We just have to keep working. We did put together two touchdown drives and that helped us to win the game. We're excited at where we are at. I can guarantee you that we have an elite football team we're going to play this weekend. They should be 7-0. Air Force is very dominant at the line of scrimmage. They take care of the football. They (average 37:41) in time of possession which is unheard of. This is definitely our biggest challenge of the year."

On if last week the team tackled better and did a good job of trying to force turnovers:

"I think we still need to do a better job of when you walk about turnovers. That's one of the things that you emphasize. We talk about it, we drill (it), but the one thing I know is we get guys to the ball. We get bodies to the ball. That doesn't seem to be a problem for us. We just have to do a better job of knocking the ball out or stepping in front of a couple of picks would be nice. I'm proud of how they're playing. We just have to get the ball back."

On starting fast against an Air Force team that is outscoring its opponents, 59-14, in the first quarter:

"It's really important. There is no doubt about it. I think they start so fast because you can't simulate that offense. It's awfully hard and we've worked at it in the spring a little bit, a little bit during fall camp and working hard at it right now. The speed of the game is different and the speed of blocking the line of scrimmage is different than what we're going to see on Saturday."

On what the key is to stopping the triple option:

"I think it's the combination of everybody. With my background it's always been you've got to stop the fullback and I still believe that. That's the first element. You've got to hit him. You can't let him stay upright because if he stays upright and goes down through the line of scrimmage and you're the guy who is responsible whether he has the ball or not you've got to tackle him. You can't let him run through your linebackers and get to the second level. He becomes a heck of a blocker then. I think it's fullback and we've got to give them enough looks (on defense)."

On who's the starting quarterback and the backup quarterback this week:

"Lucas (Johnson) will be the guy who will start the football team and Will (Haskell) will be the second guy. Obviously, Lucas finished the other night on a high note. He has the hot hand right now. He continues to practice well and the same thing with Will."

On the final play at San Jose State where Lucas Johnson audibled to a pass play to Jesse Matthews:

"You're reaction is you've got a lot of faith and you believe in those two. You believe in both of them. (Lucas) had gone to Jesse before - same play, same check - and I felt pretty good about it. Obviously if it didn't work out I wouldn't feel as good."

On if Air Force is one of the best teams in the Mountain West:

"I don't think there's any doubt about it. They went to Boise (State) last weekend and won a tough game by a touchdown. They're a good football team. (Air Force head coach) Troy (Calhoun) is really a good football coach. They're always going to be good rushing the football (and) with time of possession. But they are 11th in the country defensively and it just tells you how good of a total football team (Air Force) is."

On Matt Araiza being named to a few midseason All-America teams:

"Well he's got a lot of year left. I love what he's done to this point. I think he'd be the first one to tell you that we've got some good guys who are really playing hard on those (special) teams when you look at punts and guys getting down to down the ball or make a tackle. The kickoffs into the end zone. There's so much that Matt gives you. (Matt) running down and making a tackle. I just think it's a whole group, but Matt has done a nice job. And the one thing I can tell you is he's got the respect of his teammates. Just because of what he does daily. I'm talking about how he gets ready in practice, how he goes through a practice, what he did in winter conditioning (and) summer conditioning. How he is as an athlete he's got the respect of his teammates."

Senior linebacker Caden McDonald

On the challenge of facing the Air Force offense:

"This week is really big on focusing on our keys, reading our keys and playing our fundamentals. It's not just going out and doing whatever you want to do. We've got to be really focused this week and determined. Whatever our job is that play we do exactly that and read our key. Then we play from there. Don't just assume or guess what's going to happen. You have to read your keys strictly and then play off that."

On Air Force being so effective on fourth down (17-for-21):

"That'll definitely be a thing this week. They go for a lot of fourth downs and if we need to hold them to four-and-outs, we'll be glad to take on the challenge. That's what our defense prides itself on is getting the punt return team on the field and getting the offense the ball back. So if four-and-outs is the way we have to do it then we'll do it."

On what he sees from their quarterback and running backs:

"Their whole team is loaded with great athletes and great players. Their offensive line is really physical and they get after it. Their fullback is a great runner and runs the heck out of the ball. Their quarterback is a field general for that offense. He runs it very well. He's a great, athletic quarterback and can really run that offense. I have high respect for him and that entire team for everything they do on and off the field. I have much respect for them but on the field we have to contain him and be sound in our assignments and I think that will help us."

On what it means to come up with a big stop on fourth-and-1 at San Jose State:

"Getting a fourth down stop is huge for the defense because that's the chance to see what your defense is really made of. That's the true test to see because you get third downs every drive but when you get to see the fourth down versus the offense and stop them, that's a huge momentum swing and that gets everyone going. I know the offense was pumped about it. When we came to the sideline the whole team was ecstatic about that and it gave the defense more confidence to know we got this. We just keep doing our job and keep doing our assignment, and we knew we were going to know these guys out and win the game."

Junior wide receiver Jesse Matthews

On if the winning touchdown at San Jose State on Friday he saw expected Lucas Johnson to throw the ball:

"Honestly it was a bit of a surprise. I knew we were trying to set up the field goal, but I saw the same coverage he did. It was one-on-one with the corner. He looked at me and did the audible so I kind of did the rest from there."

On the Air Force defense:

"We know they always play us tough. Those are just a tough group of guys. We know what they do outside of school and football, and the dedication it takes to go to Air Force and serve our country. We know they're going to be a tough group of guys and we have to prepare accordingly."

On what it felt like not being as involved as he'd like to and then having a breakup game at San Jose State:

"It's been testing my patience a little bit. Just trusting that eventually it will all work out. (Wide receiver coach Hunkie Cooper) always says just be ready when my opportunity comes and that's what I try to do. Going every day at practice, just work hard, and then when the opportunity arises make the most out of it. That's what I really tried to do throughout the first few weeks of the season. When I get my opportunities I try to make the most out of them."

On his relationship with quarterback Lucas Johnson:

"We've worked hard throughout the offseason and every day in practice I'm catching balls from him. I think the relationship is pretty solid. There's not going to be a lot of adjustments because we've had a lot of work together and throwing with all the quarterbacks. I feel pretty solid in that foundation we built."

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