



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

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San Diego State Men's Basketball Press Conference  
March 17, 2024

### Head Coach Brian Dutcher

#### Opening Statement

"Seeing our name come up never gets old. It was almost like deja vu from a year ago. Number one overall seed, Connecticut, and last year, Alabama, fifth seed again. Our name came up in the first 30 seconds of the announcement, it felt good. I'm excited for the opportunity. I've known the University of Alabama at Birmingham's Head Coach Andy Kennedy for a long time. He's a very good coach and they're a very good team, obviously very hot right now winning their conference tournament. I watched them one time this year. I had an evening where I turned games on and was amazed at how athletic and well-coached they were. It will be a real challenge for us to play a very good UAB team. The other thing I noticed about the bracket is that three of the teams from last year's Final Four: UConn, Florida Atlantic, and San Diego State are all in the same bracket. It's a little ironic but it's fun to look at. I'm sure people have fun talking about that leading into the games."

#### On the NCAA Tournament bracket matchups:

"They're clever with how they set it up, obviously it's a strong bracket. Auburn just won the SEC tournament and UAB just won their conference tournament. These are hot teams. They'll be a challenge for us. Yale, on the other side against Auburn won their conference tournament. Three conference tournament champions are on our side. Obviously, we fell a game short of ours, but everybody in that bracket is playing really good basketball, they're coming in on win streaks."

#### On slow starts in games:

"The beauty of basketball is not how you start; it's how you finish. We've been on the upper end of most of them lately, so we have to continue to find a way to win games. Obviously, you'd like to get off to a faster start, but sometimes that's not in the cards. Whatever the game starts like, we will be there for the 40 minutes."

#### On identifying who will perform well:

"We have to make shots. Everybody knows that. The three-point shot is the greatest weapon in the game. Against Utah State, multiple players made some, not just one guy. We don't need everybody to make them on a given night, but we need someone to step up and get hot. Hopefully that will happen in the NCAA Tournament."

#### On keeping players on a scoring run:

"Well, you got to see the first one go in and after the first goes in you run another play to form it right away and try to keep that hot head going but that's coaching. The other team knows that too when they try to take away what you do best. Jaedon Ledee has drawn a lot of attention. I know there's a lot to be made that he didn't score early in the New Mexico game, but

that's because he played basketball perfectly tuning out all of their shots. If they go in, then we get off to the start we want. We've seen both versions of Jaedon: the one where he forces his game, and the one where he shares the ball and plays his game. That version is way better and will give us a lot better chance of success in the tournament."

**On how the team will replicate last season's success:**

"Just get hot, get fortunate, and win a close game. College of Charleston went to the wire. Virginia was supposed to be our second on-court opponent bracket-wise. They got upset by Furman. It just shakes out how it shakes out. Whether it's last year with Purdue losing their first game. You never know, it's the NCAA tournament. I'm sure UConn is looking at their first game and looking at how we are playing Florida Atlantic, the team that made the semis last year in our second game. It's always interesting. It's about matchups and who's playing well, so there are no upsets in the tournament. The hot hand wins in this thing."

**On starting the tournament in Spokane:**

"I mean if you're going to be in the East Regional, what better place to start than as far west as you can go. We'll make the other teams travel at least in the first round. Hopefully, we can have some success up in Spokane and play in the future rounds. We'll have our hands full in Spokane as well. We all know that."

**On preparation for the tournament:**

"It's good. I like the Friday start; it gives us more prep time to recover a little bit and come up with a game plan. I'm sure those teams that are traveling from so far east all the way to Spokane probably are welcoming the extra day of travel to get there. It worked out well. Salt Lake would have been the other side and I'm not much for playing at an altitude if I don't have to. I think Spokane is about as good a site as we could hope for."

**On playing in Spokane:**

I think it gives us and more importantly, our fans the best chance to get to a game. To get west for them to get there for a Friday game. It's better to get our fan base out there. Our fans will travel. We'll have a good contingent of Aztec fans in Spokane. I know we will."

**On the effect of playing in Spokane:**

"It's more due to having good players than the city we play in. We've had good players, and we continue to have good players. Hopefully, we will be playing at our best when our best is required. It will be required on Friday morning."

**On seeing the team's reaction on Selection Sunday:**

"It never gets old. It's the greatest feeling in the world to have these guys go. I told them yesterday when we got beat in Las Vegas in 2023 when Utah State's Sam Merrill hit the game winning shot. I told them, 'Don't worry about it. You're going to experience the greatest thing you've ever experienced in the NCAA tournament.' This is Malachi Flynn, Yanni Wetzell, KJ Feagin, who were as good college players you could ever have that never played in the NCAA Tournament one time. COVID shutting it down from going that year. You can never take it for granted. You should never take it for granted. When you get your name called. It's a tremendous privilege. There are 351 division one teams, and only 68 hear their name called and we're one of them. The beauty of our program is that we've consistently been one of them."

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## Senior Guard Lamont Butler

### **On his reaction during Selection Sunday:**

"It was great. It's always a dream to play in March Madness: playing in a big tournament and seeing our name up there early is good. We can't wait to go out there and compete."

### **On the team's reaction this time last year:**

"Yeah, it kind of caught us off guard but we were ready to come in and will be ready when the time comes to play on Friday."

### **On playing in Spokane being an advantage:**

"Maybe a little bit but you know this is March Madness, anything happens. We have to go out there and just play hard. Control what we can control we can try to win a game."

### **On University of Alabama of Birmingham:**

"They won their conference this year. I haven't really seen any of their players play, but I know they're going to be a really good team. We're going to be ready to play when the time comes."

### **On helping Jaedon LeDee on the court:**

"We've just got to continue to play with confidence. Jaedon LeDee is going to draw in so much attention just because of how dominant he is. If we are able to hit shots from outside, it's going to relieve pressure off him and then we're going to be able to win games like that. Defensively, we're always going to be great. So, continue to do that. Just play with confidence."

### **On experience playing in the NCAA Tournament being an advantage:**

"I think so. I mean, we know what to expect. We know the atmosphere is going to be there. So we'll be ready to play."

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