



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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New Mexico at San Diego State Postgame Quotes

San Diego State 81, New Mexico 70

Steve Fisher Court at Viejas Arena | San Diego, Calif. | February 16, 2024

Head Coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"Tonight was a really good hard fought team victory, and Assistant Coach Dave Velasquez said after the game 'This was the first game he felt like everybody contributed. Everybody played at a high level.' That was the case. Everyone who came off the bench produced and the starters produced. We kept waiting for New Mexico to make the run because we knew how talented they were. When they finally made a run, we were able to withstand it. That was really, really fun to watch. Elijah Saunders hit critical threes for us in that stretch, and unafraid, he stepped up. He was open, he let it go. Those were important baskets he made.

"We knew they were dangerous on the break. We didn't want to give them fast breaks. We did a decent job at that, but we still turned the ball over 20 times. Their defense is tough, they put a lot of pressure on you. We had 20 assists on 29 baskets, which is really good. We held them to 35.5% shooting, and we shot in the 50s. Rebounding is always an issue with them. JT Toppin is one of the best rebounders in the conference, if not the best. He had 16 rebounds the first time we played him, and he had seven offensive rebounds this game. He's a dynamic rebounder and we worked all week trying to hit him, keep a body on him to keep him off the glass but he is relentless. We switched all ball screens, so New Mexico had to score in different ways. They're so good at screen and roll, finding the rolling post, getting shots on that. We switched, and we just tried to keep a body in front of a body. There were times when they rolled the bigs, and we had guards on, and then they took advantage of it. Overall, we were dictating how they were scoring more than they were with their offense. We were able to dictate the tempo. The key was, our bigs were able to stay in front of the guards once we switched. They hurt us inside. But I thought, for the most part, our bigs did a good job of staying in front of their guards and shrinking the floor in to help. When New Mexico did drive, they looked at a lot of bodies. We had a great defensive game plan by the assistant coaches, and the guys followed it basically on a one-day prep and did a really good job. I'm proud of the whole team and proud of the win. We'll go to Logan and play Utah State for first place on Tuesday. We may be tied depending on what happens at Colorado State tomorrow, or we'll be playing a game back. But we'll be playing for first place on Tuesday in Logan, and that's a great place to be at this time of the year."

On turnovers and the next-play mentality:

"New Mexico takes advantage of turnovers. If you turn the ball over on them, it's a layup. The fact that we turned it over 20 times and were able to win is a bit of a miracle. We withstood. We've always been a next-play mentality team. We'll have plenty of time to watch the tape on Sunday when we get back together and correct things. But when you're playing, you can't

sit there and obsess over every mistake, or you're not ready to make the next play. We just try to move on to the next play. Whether we make a mistake or not, it's a next-play mentality. The team's getting better at that. It's always a coach to saying, 'Focus on the next play,' and hard to do because, as a player, you're frustrated by a call, or you don't touch the ball, or your guy beat you, and then you're mad over that. You have to move on beyond that instantly, so you don't compound mistakes. We try to have a next-play mentality, and the guys are getting better at that.

On the differences between the first and second game against New Mexico:

"We played a deep drop the first game against New Mexico, and I thought it was effective at times, but we looked back, and we wanted to have them beat us in the half-court like Colorado State. We didn't want to let them get out and run for layups. We wanted to make them beat us in the half-court. When we did that, we were pretty effective, keeping it in a half-court game because they're so good at running. We changed it up. We tried to keep a body in front of a body. The biggest concern was rebounding when guards had to box bigs out, but we got just enough to maintain the lead and win the game."

Sophomore Guard Miles Byrd

On the recent compliments about his hustle and shot blocking:

"I definitely notice the compliments and the love that the fans give, and I'm going to be out there, that's what I need to do. Everybody has a role in this team. This year, that is my role to be the energy guy and to get a second chance opportunity on the steal or other opportunities. I'm trying to fill my role to the best of my abilities."

On reducing turnovers in the second half:

"We looked at our turnovers at halftime when the coaches showed us, and that was the last turnover from me. I knew it wasn't acceptable."

Sophomore Forward Elijah Saunders

On keeping a clear head during his eight-point run:

"Thanks to Miles Byrd for throwing me that lob before the dunk. These past couple of games, I've been trying to have a clear head while playing and not think about the shots I've missed or mistakes. I try to keep levelheaded and knowing that good things are coming."

On the difference between being in the starting lineup and coming off the bench:

"It's got to a point where I was in the starting lineup, but it was mentally rough. January was a rough month for me. Being able to come off the bench, I get to watch the game a little and get a feel for it before I have to go in. I know I'm probably going in with Miles Byrd, who's bringing energy, so I have to match that as well. I feel a lot more relaxed coming off the bench."

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New Mexico Head Coach Richard Pitino

Opening statement:

"Give [San Diego State] credit. They're really, really hard to stop. You know, LeDee is a force, and he's getting stronger and tougher and posting up harder. He reminds me of Zach Edey [at Purdue], he just makes you foul him. We showed great heart to cut it to three. We had three possessions that we couldn't capitalize on. Then we had some crucial turnovers that allowed the building to really get going, so credit to them. They're really, really good. It's hard to sweep a team that's that good. It will be good to get home; we've been out for a while and go get three great days of practice."

On the lopsided nature of the SDSU win:

"They had 20 assists. We had six. That's a pretty lopsided stat. When you're scouting, you're talking about 'How do you stop them.' But you've got to play good offense. We had times we didn't do that and allowed them to get out of the break, and that's really hard to overcome."

On SDSU's defense:

"Their length bothered all of our guys. They're a really, really good defensive team."

On Jadeon LeDee:

"He's one of the best players in the country. We probably did the best job at our place [guarding him]. Not too many people shut him down, and that's because he's a great player."

New Mexico State Guard Jemarl Baker, Jr.

On the environment at Viejas:

"The environment is fun. It's what you want as a player to play in big games like this. It just would have been more fun if we came up with the win."

On the Mountain West conference race:

"It's fun. That's what you want as a player. You want it to be challenging and it is. We go out there and continue to try to get better."

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