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San Diego State-Air Force Postgame Quotes

SDSU head coach Brian Dutcher

On opening statement:

"Well obviously I am pleased how we came off the Vegas loss. I thought the team responded well. I told them on the Sunday after we met that it's not going to take us two months to get this thing turned around. It's going to start today. If you say you want to get better at something, then we can start the process today. It doesn't have to be three weeks. So I challenged them to get better defensively and I think they did today. Now we helped them some by mixing defenses and playing some zone for the first time in a long time. That's on me; we probably should have zoned more this season. The way Air Force was shooting the ball we thought we had an opportunity to zone and have some success with it. We played a lot of zone. I told DJ Gay after the game that we played a lot more zone today than he did in his four years here. I thought the zone was effective for us. We only had eight available bodies tonight. Mike (Sohikish) our manager was the ninth man in. Nolan Narain had a shoulder problem; they kept him out of practice for two days. Trey (Kell) is still nursing the ankle. With eight men I thought the zone was effective for us, and allowed not to chase that offense around. Again, we shot the ball well. We have a very good shooting team. When Max (Montana), Jeremy (Hemsley), Devin (Watson), and Jordan (Schakel) are making them, we are a deadly shooting team. I think we were eight for 16 in the first half, I don't know what we ended up. They zoned us, and the way to beat a zone is a high post-low post and open threes. I thought we did all of those very well tonight."

On tonight's zone defense:

"I thought we knew what to do, but we didn't play it enough where we would make a mistake and teach to it. There is only so much time and practice. If we are going 90 minutes or two hours, to be good at something you have to devote time to it. So this week we devoted more time to our zone. We worked on it, we watched film on it, and we studied past games where we zoned. Our zone was effective against Fresno (State) in the first half. The second half, we had some breakdowns, but they were breakdowns where we knew that right thing to do. We just didn't do it. We've been working on zone all year, maybe devoted more time to it this week. After watching Air Force getting zoned some, they struggle from three a little bit. We thought instead of chasing them around and letting them shoot threes, let's let them shoot threes out of the zone where you don't have to chase so much. Obviously, we pressed both man and zone. That is more thinking we aren't going to cause turnovers. If we press, we will only have to defend in the half court for 20 seconds, instead of 30. So we pressed short in our defensive possessions at the other end."

On the success of the zone:

"First of all, the coaches have to buy in on it. We are the ones who have to call it and say we are going to play it. We made a concerted effort and decision that we are going to play some zone. So we spent some time on it. I think we can go back and watch some tape on it and have some teachable moments to improve on it. I like the zone. Our man defense is good too. I thought we had a good week of man defense, and the few times we did man we did a good job executing our game plan. A step forward defensively, and that's what we need to do if we want to be the team that everybody says they want to be. I put on the board, 'Defensive rebounding wins championships.' That's on every locker room in the country, but it has to mean something. If we want to win a championship and the conference tournament in March, we have to get better defensively and rebound the ball better."

On Jeremy Hemsley and Max Montana:

"Jeremy has played great again. It always helps when that first three goes in and then your confidence starts skyrocketing. Then he made another one and his confidence is up again. Basketball, like any other sport, is a game of confidence. When your confidence is high you are playing at a higher level. I mentioned Max, from where he was after the Boise (State) game to where he is now, is light years. He is so valuable to us, and we are playing him at multiple positions and minutes. He was ready because he worked hard. His opportunity has come again and he has made the most of it. It's almost hard not to have him on the court."

SDSU freshman forward Jalen McDaniels

On getting ahead early in the game:

"We just stayed locked in and kept the pace of the game. We tried to not rush anything or force anything like trying to get up by a lot. We stayed with the course of the game and keep doing what we do. The results showed that."

On only having eight players available tonight:

"We know we can win with anybody who plays on our team, so I feel like with eight guys we know we can win. When everybody plays, we know they're going to do their part and step up, so eight guys was fine. With everyone doing their job it will translate to a W."

On looking for the big play:

"It just happens. You keep playing hard, crashing the glass. Things just happen when you play hard. That's how it happens, I guess."

On what the big plays do for the team:

"It energizes the team. It gives us more confidence to lock up on defense, lock in on offense, and to not turn the ball over. I feel like when we get energetic plays like that it helps us a lot."

SDSU junior guard Jeremy Hemsley

On playing a zone defense tonight:

"No. Never. I remember when I first started looking at State, you see the press and you see the man defense, but Air Force forces you to play zone or you're going to have to guard their offense for the whole 25 seconds or however long they hold the ball because they do so many back cuts and do so many slips. That's a lot on the guys mentally and you get tired really easily, so I think this was just one of those games where it was necessary to play zone. We don't really do that much, but like you said, I don't think I've ever imagined myself playing that much zone in a game."

On having big wins at home and following them with losses:

"I don't think so. I think we know what's at stake. We know how close we are to getting to March, so I don't think anybody is taking anything lightly. We might have done that earlier in the season like getting a big win and taking the next one lightly, but I think that just comes with experience and knowing what we have to do. I think everybody is locked in and knows the plan and the task we have at hand."

On feeling comfortable on the court:

"I felt like myself again. It was hard in the beginning of the season. It was real hard. It's not the same on the court when you just don't feel like yourself. I think I'm back to myself and I know my role. The guys needed me to be that energetic guy. I can't just walk around and be mad at everything. I'm the goofy guy on the team, so when everybody isn't seeing that, they know something is wrong. I'm definitely feeling like myself again."

Air Force head coach Dave Pilipovich

On his team's performance:

"We talked about this before, because of their length and their size, you can't back away from them. Everything pushed us a step back and they intimidated us with their size. (Jalen) McDaniels is a really good player, 16 (points) and 13 (rebounds), he scored in different areas. (Malik) Pope had nine points and six rebounds, but he also blocked three shots. I mean, they blocked one into the fourth row. They bothered us, they moved us away, but when we got the ball to the middle, we got easy shots and we scored. But, it was right from the start, and then we were in catch-up mode the whole game."

On SDSU's offensive performance:

"They have at times, and they talk about it, that they want to attack more and go up-tempo. I think they talked about (shooting the three) at halftime, because the first couple minutes of the second half they did not attempt a three, they looked to go inside. And we were so worried about taking (Malik) Pope and (Jalen) McDaniels from their dive action inside, and then we couldn't keep (Kameron) Rooks off the glass. It's frustrating. It was a wake-up call from the first play, as Ryan Swan caught it and then turned it right over."