



SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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San Diego State-Nevada Postgame Quotes

San Diego State head coach Brian Dutcher

Opening Statement:

"Well this was my first senior night, too, as a head coach, so I had to make sure I thanked them properly for all the hard work they've given this program. I told Malik (Pope) and Trey (Kell) when I got this job that I couldn't have two better seniors to start my career with than them. I said it again to them tonight. Obviously it was a blessing to get Kam (Rooks) to join us, with his experience, his maturity, to go through what he's gone through—probably deserved more minutes than he got—but when his name was called, he was ready and he answered. I'm so proud of Kam. These seniors have done nothing but represent this university with great class, both on the floor and off. They are going to get their degrees. They're going to represent this university far better off the floor than they ever did on it, so I'm so proud of all of them. I told the team two weeks ago that we're the best team in this conference, and if you don't believe that, then you shouldn't step on the floor. We believe we're the best team in this conference, so we have to prove it every night we go out there. I thought our kids did it tonight. They didn't look panicked. They didn't look out of sorts when Nevada made a run. They knew Nevada was a good team, but they were up for every challenge. Our defense is getting so much better right now that it's allowing us to miss a couple shots and still stay in the game. Our rebounding was great for such a physical team like they are, and our numbers— we've developed this bench all year to have it, so it's great to have it right now. Nevada plays their hearts out, but they have a short bench. You're only playing six or seven guys, and we're going nine or 10 deep. That makes a difference. Hopefully that will really make a difference next week in Vegas when we get to the conference tournament. We'll be able to keep fresh legs on the floor all the time because everybody that I put out there is contributing and helping the team to victories. With that said, we're ready for Vegas. We would have been ready to play four games or three. It's about how you're playing, not how many. We're playing good basketball. Now we'll have Fresno, who has beaten us twice. That will give us a little extra motivation to look at both of those games and find out what we can do better to maybe get them this time around. We're excited for that opportunity. I know one thing: the Aztec fans were great tonight, and they're always great in Vegas. They will follow us there and we will be well-represented. We will have as close to a home feel in the Thomas and Mack as any of these teams. The Aztec fans travel and they'll travel to Vegas. Together, we will go in there and we will find a way to try to win this Mountain West Tournament."

On continuing the message to stay focused on what's next:

"We're not distracted at all because we're not on the bubble. We're not in the NCAA conversation. We know our path—it's winning three games in Vegas, so we don't sit there and say, well who won, who lost, are we on the bubble, are we last four in—we're not in unless we win three games. We're not distracted by all that other stuff. This team is singularly focused on winning three games in Vegas. I think you saw, they're not a real emotional bunch up here. They go to work, put their hard hat on and try to get better every day."

On Kameron Rooks:

"Kam has the hardest job in the world. He started the first 10 games or so, and then he went to the bench and his minutes dwindled. Nolan (Narain) played well and Nolan played those minutes. Nolan came in, in the first half today, but I think we can all see Kam played better today than Nolan, so Kam's minutes grew. That's the way it works, there's no entitlement in this program. If you're play well, you'll be on the floor. If you're not, we'll have someone in for you and you'll have another opportunity the next game. Kam was playing well so his minutes grew. He was invaluable on the floor tonight for us."

On Nevada's defensive strategy against Malik Pope:

"They tried to double Malik and Kam (Rooks) did a good job of ledging the backside. It takes both of them. It takes Kam carving out that position, it takes Malik having great vision and finding him and getting it to the point where they had to quit doubling him. That allowed Malik to back down and score himself. That was part of the plan today, we thought we could go inside and play inside out, and it worked. We also spent time in the game where we were small and tried to spread the floor and ball screen and drive to the basket. So we played a couple different styles tonight and they were both successful."

On SDSU's defensive strategy to stop Jordan Caroline:

"Yeah, Caroline's a monster. To me, he's a first team all-conference player and if it wasn't for (Caleb) Martin, he'd be in the conversation for conference player of the year. Basically, I know they talk about Hutchison (Chandler Hutchison at Boise State) and I know he's had a great year but to me, it's a three-player race. It's Hutchison, Caroline, and Martin, so, he played like an MVP tonight. He was sensational, he plays so hard. When he's making the three, he's extra hard to guard. Sometimes you take a chance and give him some open threes and just hope he misses because if you go out and try to guard him he drives around you. It was a fantastic performance from him tonight and we're very fortunate to come out of here with a win because they've got a very good team, which is very obvious to everybody."

On Trey Kell's converted jumper after called timeout late in the second half:

"That was spread the floor and give the ball to Trey. It was a high ball screen, sometimes we set them, sometimes we slip them, when we run up there and leave right away so they don't switch, we give an angle. I know I've said this on multiple occasions, this is what I've been waiting for for Trey — to be in close games and get him the ball and to let him make plays to win or lose games for us. So whether it's an assist, which he had a ton of again, or it's making the big shot. When you miss that player for eight games it has an effect on your year. We're grateful he's back and working himself into shape and that boads well for the Aztecs in Las Vegas."

On Kameron Rooks' role moving forward:

Well, if I'm a smart coach, I play him. So, I'll be playing Kam. Nolan (Narain) will be fighting for those minutes and I'll play the best players. That's what they want from their coach. If you're playing well, they want to know that they have a chance to get their minutes. Kameron played well enough and is deserving of minutes. Like I said, the hardest thing in basketball is when you're not getting minutes and being ready when your name is called. You can go into it emotionally down and when your names called you're not ready because you're emotionally down. Kam's never been that way and that's part of having a fifth-year senior and a mature kid in the program so when his name was called he answered."

San Diego State senior forward Malik Pope

On this being the team they've always talked about:

"Glimpses here and there. We're getting a lot better than where we started. You can tell by just the style of play and the temp that we play with that's so controlled. We're making great progress and we're excited for Fresno. No days off."

On working the post down low with Kameron Rooks:

"It was just something you saw on the court as the plays broke down. They were scared of the big guy down there for some reason and it just ended up open every single time. It just panned out and made the right play and he was able to finish."

On where the team is at right now:

"I feel like we've just done a great job fighting through adversity. We've kind of gone through a couple injuries this season that hurt us, couple problems off the court. I think we've really just adjusted. We found our chemistry and learned a lot about each other throughout the process of the ups and downs throughout the season. I feel like today, and Boise, and the game before was kind of just a testament to how we're growing as a unit and continuing that forward."

On potentially playing just three games in the Mountain West tournament:

"It's definitely something that we can look forward to, and having more preparation time. I feel like we can take advantage of it and use it the best way we possibly can."

San Diego State senior guard Trey Kell

Thoughts on Senior Night:

"It was a great game against a great team. Obviously we knew it was going to be a challenge with the focus being on Senior Night, but we just did our best sticking to the game plan, playing together, and the crowd was great tonight. All of those put together, I'm glad we came out with a victory on my last home game here."

On his huge shot in the last minute:

"I just decided I had the confidence in myself. I know it's a shot I could get to at any time because they do a lot of switching. My teammates give me that confidence to take that shot. I saw he was giving me space, so I just rose up. I'm glad I made the shot for the team."

On coming back from his ankle injury:

"I think the thing that has also been frustrating with the injuries is that they're injuries where I really can't do too much, so there will be weeks or some days where I can't get in the gym and shoot because I can't put pressure on my ankle. It's been getting better. Now that it has, I can get back to putting up extra shots and things of that nature. Today it was starting to feel good again, and like I said, it was with the flow, and my teammates were finding me at the right time."

On being the favorite heading in to the tournament:

"I don't think that's the case. For us, we believe we're the best team, but I don't think the media or the outside world is going to all of a sudden think we're the best team because we're on our little bit of a roll. To be honest, we don't really care. The main thing for us is to just stay healthy, get better each day at practice, and just ride this momentum as long as we can. If we do that, we can make some things happen."

On how he's feeling after a huge win:

"To be honest, I'm just hungry. I need some food. I'm a little bit sore, so I'm ready to go relax. It was a great win, don't get me wrong, but I don't get too high or too low on a win. It was a game we expected to win coming in, and I'm glad we did, but I'm not jumping with joy inside or anything like that."

On what flipped the switch for the team:

"I don't think there was one specific thing. I think just the main thing we've been saying all year is that we're a better team when we have all our pieces. I'm not trying to sit here and say I'm the reason that we're winning, but I feel like I play a big part on this team. Watching from the bench, I could just see what we needed. I'm just here to help with the journey, and obviously everyone else has been playing great, too."

On being excited play Fresno:

"Yes. That's it."

San Diego State senior center Kameron Rooks**Thoughts on today's standout game:**

"I'm not going to lie, it's been a frustrating journey, but I'm glad that the coaches gave me the opportunity to go out there and play and show everybody what I can do and for me to help this team get a W. I guess it was the senior connection tonight because Trey and Malik were really the only ones who passed me the ball, so it feels good to at least get the ball."

On working the post down low with Malik Pope:

"My guy would go and try to double Malik and they would crash down, and all I had to do was seal them and be open for the pass. That's all I did and thank God he delivered it to me."

On how the journey has been frustrating:

"You just start at the beginning of the year and I guess things aren't going the way you planned it to be for your last year here. I'm just glad he gave me the opportunity. They trusted me out there. That's the one thing I feel like affected me the most — just trust. That's it."

Nevada head coach Eric Musselman

On the team's performance this season:

"It has been a really great regular season. Having said that, we walked into the building trying to win the game. To take 12 foul shots for one of the best free throw attempt teams in the league, we were not going to get to the line tonight. It probably is not going to change in the conference tournament so we need to figure it out to overcome that."

On the success of the game plan:

"Our whole thing was we were going to drive them and out-pressure and try and get free throws attempted. Everybody saw the game. We got outplayed, but when you are telling your team to drive the ball and they are driving the ball, it is very physical to take 12 free throws. But it is not going to change in Vegas."

On San Diego State's performance tonight:

"I thought there were some momentum plays that happened that weren't players. They did a good job on the glass. I thought Trey Kell played really well. They out-played us. They won the game. Both halves were very close. I thought the last three minutes of the first half we were really bad. When we play six, seven games, we can't have guys not have 'A' games. We had too many guys tonight have subpar performances. We can't do that with the makeup of our roster."

On the inability to get to the free throw line:

"We couldn't force our way to the rim and draw contact I guess."

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