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San Diego State Football Press Conference Quotes Tuesday, Oct. 9, 2018

Head Coach Rocky Long

Opening statement:

"With the short week it's awful tough to get ready for the wishbone or triple option. It's going to make it hard on us. They're coming in with a lot of confidence because I think they've decided on who their quarterback is and he's playing really well. They put it to Navy, and you would guess that Navy or Army would have the best idea how to defense the triple option. And Air Force ran them right out of the ballpark with the 35-7 score. So they're coming in here with a lot of confidence, and I'm sure they're excited and happy and ready to play. We don't get to celebrate anything very much, and we've got another tough one on Friday night.

On the problems Air Force poses coming into a short week:

"It's very difficult because they're radical on defense, too. Now, you've heard me say this before, I think the triple option is the best offense ever designed because it's the one offense, when you get on the board, you can't win. They win every time because they eliminate two guys by reading it the right way. So they have two extra blockers than any other offense has in the running game. Okay, so that's difficult to get ready for. Then on defense, they have a high-pressure blitz almost every single snap and play straight man coverage. That gives you a lot of problems on offense, but it also gives you opportunities for big plays. So it's either hit or miss. You get tackled near the line of scrimmage or you get tackled behind the line of scrimmage or you hit a 50- or 60-yarder. Our formula is to keep the ball, run the clock and their kind of defense makes it difficult to do that, where their offense makes it easy for them to keep the ball away from us for a long time. So where going into a game that's a difficult matchup not just for us, it's a difficult matchup for anybody that plays them."

On the success the Aztecs have had against Air Force and the triple-option:

"That success was a long time ago. We didn't have a lot of success last year against the triple-option. Air Force ran the ball pretty darn good against us last year, gained a bunch of yards and then Army crushed us. So you can look at that success as ancient history."

On Air Force rushing for fewer yards this year than they have historically:

"They're throwing it better since they've decided on a starting quarterback (Donald Hammond III). He throws it better. I think they had a 60- or 70-yard completion for a touchdown last week, so they're enticing you to get up there and try to stop the run and then they're exploiting your one-on-one situations in the secondary."

On his confidence in the team's ability to stop the run on Friday:

"Not at all. It's completely different rushing game than we see all the rest of the time ... If you watched practice yesterday, you can tell there's no way to simulate it. We have a scout team trying to run it, but it is so slow compared to what they're going to

see on Friday night that it's ridiculous. You just have to hope that your guys can defeat some blocks and make some plays. The thing that would really help us is turnovers. If we could cause a turnover or two, that gives your offense the ball and more opportunities to score. I don't know if you all remember the last triple-option team we played (Army), they just annihilated us on defense."

On the team's confidence level after defeating Boise State:

"I think the confidence level would be really, really high if we were playing a similar team. We're so young, I never know what (our players) are thinking, but I'm hoping they're mature enough to realize this is not the same situation. We're not going to be blitzing and rushing a drop-back quarterback. It's a completely different problem. Now if they go in there feeling good about themselves and think they're something they're not, (Air Force) will run us right out of the ballpark."

On the challenge of defending the triple-option and keeping the team focused after a big win:

"I think both are a problem. Even if they're ready to play, it's hard to get ready for a triple-option offense. Way back when you saw it a whole bunch, 40 or 50 percent of the games you saw it (in), you could get really good at playing against it. But now all you see are spread teams and then all of a sudden you run up against a triple-option team ... Last year we were getting knocked on our backs and our defensive linemen we're getting knocked back five yards. Guess what, you can't play any kind of defense when you get knocked back five yards."

On why more teams don't run the triple-option:

"I get this question every year. I honestly believe it gives you a lot of advantages, the offense gives you a lot of advantages. People don't want to watch it. They want to see the ball in the air. They want to see great athletes making big-time plays. They don't want to see someone that's happy with getting three yards a carry."

"It's hard to recruit to it, too. I'm not sure, but the only other Division I team that runs the triple-option is Georgia Tech other than the three academies. And we all respect the guys in the academies. They're not going there to be pro football players. They're going there to do something a lot more important than that, and so it doesn't matter to them what kind of offense they run. They probably like running this offense because it gives them a chance."

On the fixing the penalties for false starts that occurred in the Boise State game:

"We just talk about it. I'll say that most of those illegal procedure penalties you can blame on coaching. I don't think we had our team prepared for how loud the crowd was. I don't know how this works, but most of the time if you were concerned about how loud the crowd is going to be, you pump in loud noise or loud crowd noise during practice, which we didn't do. I think that our offensive guys had a really time hearing the snap count. Now their (Boise State's) defensive line stems, which means they line up in one place and move to another. Well, you see there's a call that they use to stem with and sometimes it sounds like a snap count, too." It might just be, 'move' but that sounds like 'hut' to some guys."

On the emergence of linebacker Kyahva Tezino:

"Here's another coaching error. As coaches, we put a lot of stock in how they look in practice, and sometimes because of the way they look in practice, you don't give them an opportunity to play. That was kind of the scenario with him last year. There were a couple of guys that performed better in practice than he did, then there were a couple of injuries and he got put in the game. And he was a whole lot better than the guys we were playing. So since that time, he's been a really good player for us and he gets better as he goes. He's even practicing better now. I don't know how that works, some guys just hit their stride a different times in their careers. But he's a really good player right now."

On whether Tezino's improved play was a just a matter of building confidence:

"It might be. Sometimes it's a maturing process, too. You get thrown in there and you actually have to do things at a certain speed. He was able to do it. Then all of sudden, you get more confident and you get better. You learn the scheme better, too. You learn what we're asking them to do better.

"All good linebackers have the same (attributes). He's big enough, he's fast enough and he's got really good instincts. He's a downhill linebacker though. He's a run guy. Now, he's a good blitzer too because he's a downhill guy. Pass coverage-wise, you don't want to match him up against the real good running back."

On quarterback Ryan Agnew and the performance of the offense vs. Boise State:

"I think our quarterback gets better every week. I think that his ability to extend plays has really helped us. He's still making a lot of inexperienced mistakes that you don't necessarily see, but I think he's played really, really well ... I'm going to give the other team credit because they have a really good defense, but I was a little disappointed on how we blocked for the run last week, which includes the offensive line and the fullback. But you have to give the other team credit because they're really good on defense, so they had something to do with that. It wasn't just our guys."

On the strengths of defensive back Darren Hall:

"I think he's a really good cover guy and he's gaining confidence as he goes. This is not his kind of game. You need defensive backs that can play like linebackers this week."

Junior offensive lineman Daishawn Dixon

On playing in the rain at Air Force last year:

"I feel like it was one of the toughest games we got to play weather-wise last year. It was just like cleats being all soaked and slippery and stuff like that. That was hard and whatnot but this year we're excited."

On playing games on a Friday night:

"Oh yeah, it's cool. It just means we get more time to relax on the weekends honestly."

On the short week before playing Air Force:

"We had practice on Sunday right after the (Boise State) game, so we came back and got right back to practice to get ready for this week."

On Air Force's defensive techniques:

"They blitz a lot. We just got to pick it up. I feel like we can pick it up because we're experience now so we just come together and communicate correctly. We'd be able to pick it up."

On the preparation of the team's backups:

"They stepped up, honestly. They stepped up and that's what we've asked for. Going into off-season we tell people all the time like there might be a time when you need to step up and be tough and like that's what they do. They step up and are tough and that's what we need in order to win, and we've been winning so they stepped up."

On his respect for players competing for a military service academy:

"To be honest, I used to live in Colorado Springs, so the Air Force Academy was my first football team I've ever seen play in college. So I've always had respect for them. My mom was in the Air Force, so growing up I'd always have respect for the Air Force and the military and what they did for the country. Going in, I always have to have respect for them. You can talk trash, but you have limits on what you say."

On the team's physicality during a game:

"Our mentality on offense is we just need to be more physical than them. If we're more physical than them, then by the fourth quarter, they should be giving it up. So if we come out more physical than them the whole game then by the end we should be winning."

On the team's perceived lack of national recognition despite its success:

"I don't mind honestly. I like being quiet about everything we do so we just come back and beat them honestly. Just be quiet. You don't need to be loud like every other team. I just know we can beat them."

On his mother's influence and what she did in the Air Force:

"My mom used to work in the dental clinic. She used to have me up there all the time to talk to her friends, so I was up there all the time seeing all the teeth they used to make, and I had to go to the dentist up there. I liked it up there, it's fun. I actually liked being around all of the military families because they're actually really close. They still talk to me to this day asking how I'm doing and asking about football. We're still a family."

On if he ever thought about joining the military?

"No, I liked the military stuff, but I didn't feel like the military was for me.

"I take orders here every day. I never had a problem taking orders, it just wasn't for me. I was never really interested in the planes and stuff like that honestly."

Junior linebacker Kyahva Tezino**On facing Air Force's triple-option offense:**

"The triple-option is a physical offense. If we don't come ready to out physical them then they're going to out physical us and that's something that we don't want, obviously. As a program, we preach on being physical and you guys can see we run the ball too so it's going to be a physical game and it's probably going to be a short game because the clock is going to continue to run. So we just need to come out and be physical. Their offense is a physical mindset kind of offense, so we just need to be ready to go."

On defeating Air Force in the rain last year:

"It's a blessing. Not many teams make it out of that kind of setting and especially that kind of weather so I'm so glad we made it out with a win last year.

"Last year it was kind of crazy. I kind of went in with a swollen ankle and came back on the plane, came back to San Diego and it wasn't swollen. That's how cold and rainy it was."

On playing games on a Friday night:

"Friday night games are pretty cool. We get to relax, like he said, and get your body ready for the next game."

On his respect for players competing for a military service academy:

"Yeah, we have so much respect for them because you know what they're going to do after they graduate. We have the upmost respect for them. We don't really talk trash to them. We just go out to play our game and it's just a quiet, physical game. It's kind of awkward but it's cool. It's fun to talk trash, but when it comes to the Air Force you don't want to talk trash because they're saving our lives every day."

On his early hit last week against Boise State quarterback Brett Rypien:

"That was the goal to just rile him up. Rypien is a great player and we knew that if nobody got to him then he was going to tear us apart, so I just tried to take it upon myself to get to him. I'm just glad we ended up winning and glad it ended up happening so everything worked out the way it planned."

Do you like games like this because you're a north-south, physical player?

"Oh yeah, I love games like this honestly because film is easy and you don't really have to think a lot. You know exactly what they're going to do, so I love games like this. I like the physicality and both sides of the ball, offense and defense, that we bring on our side and their side. It's going to be a good game."

On the challenges for this week's game:

"Like Coach Long said, you can never scheme on this kind of offense or anything because they do so many things that is un-schemable. You can just try to plan for something, but I mean like their angles that they take, how low they get off the ball and how fast the triple-option hits. It's just you cannot scheme it. The only you can beat it is being the most physical team so that's how we're playing."

On playing against the triple-option last year vs. Air Force and then Army:

"I feel like we took away that we probably doubted ourselves a little bit. Well, we didn't doubt ourselves, but we probably had like a little arrogance to us. Now that we know we play teams like this, we play the Air Force every year and to go see Army, the best one to do it at the time, so it was like an eye-opener for me because it was obviously my first time playing a triple-option team. It's a physical game. Your body is going to be hurting for like two or three weeks probably. After Army, my body was hurting for like a month straight. It's a crazy game but we just got to get after them. I'm ready for the challenge, though, and I'm happy it's upon us now."

On the team's perceived lack of national recognition despite its success:

"That's what's special about our team, we love being the underdogs. Whatever week we're going into, in our mindset, we hope we're the underdogs every week because we want to come back and prove to everyone that we are somebody. We don't care for all the recognition like that. We're kind of like the team to just go out there and do our work and do our job and win the game."

On Aztec assistant coach Zach Arnett:

"Coach Arnett obviously deserves everything he's accomplished. Coach Arnett is a good guy. He obviously saw something in me to put me in the last five or six games of the season. Like I told you guys before, I couldn't have had any other way. I love what I've done. I'm a team guy so I'll step into any role and try my best at anything I do. He put me in the right position at the right time. Timing is everything. I just can't thank him enough and I thank God for making me come here and be able to be under him."