



## SAN DIEGO STATE AZTECS MEDIA RELATIONS

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

GOAZTECS.COM | @GOAZTECS | @AZTECSPR | #GOAZTECS

### 2018 SDSU Football Signing Day Press Conference

#### Head Coach Rocky Long

##### **On National Signing Day:**

"This day is a little weird and a whole lot different than National Signing Days in the past since we've had an early signing period in December. The drama and wondering if you are going to get letters of intent in this morning is completely different than it's ever been before. I think our coaches did a great job of evaluating talent and recruiting the local players that we thought could play since we had 11 local players sign with us, a couple here today and most of them in December. I think that's the highlight of this class, but it's a lot different. Usually you're here at four o'clock in the morning wondering if you're going to get letters of intent from back east or wherever and then you stay all day waiting and they come in or don't come in."

##### **On if the national trend of kids flipping on commitments trickled down to SDSU:**

"I think the early signing day really helped us. I don't know which one of these young men would have been attractive to any of those schools but I know there are four or five guys that signed with us in December that would've been hit hard the last two weeks to try and flip them to somebody else and since we were able to sign those guys in December, they weren't able to do that to our recruiting class. They have in the past and they have to everyone else too. I think what happened was 84 to 85 percent of Division I athletes signed in the early signing date. So that means there are 15 percent out there and probably more scholarships than players who can play at this level. The recruiting got down and dirty and that's why you saw so many flips today and yesterday."

##### **On if signing 24 players is to purposely keep one slot open in case someone becomes available:**

"No, our program is in the position right now that you have an 85 scholarship limit. So what happens sometimes is with the addition of 24, you're already at 85. We're not, we're right at 84 so there is one scholarship out there for someone that might pop up in the next couple weeks or spring recruiting that would help our football team. There will be a lot of guys available, like every year, after everybody has their spring practice. There will be a lot of graduate students getting ready to play their fifth year and thought they were going to be a starter and they end up not being a starter and they start hunting a place to graduate transfer to. That's also after our spring practice when we'll know our team a lot better and where we might need a player or two."

##### **On how the recruiting process was for him:**

"I think the early signing date helped us. I don't know how or if it even helped anyone else but it helped us. We're proud as a staff that we were able to attract so many local kids to stay here in town. And there are kids, no matter how good your program is, that don't want to stay home. They want to go away to college, but there are some that want to stay home that either don't think the local school is good enough or has a high enough profile to stay. I think it's taken four or five years, but we've bridged

that gap finally. If you look at the facts about how good this program has been the last three years, it's one of the top ten programs in the country. We don't get that kind of credit or publicity but there is hardly anybody that gets the kind of statistics [we do] in the entire country. I think that the local athletes see that. We might not get that credit except at the high school level but they want to be a part of our program."

**On if this is a launch to even greater heights:**

"That's my point, we're already there. We're not being given credit for being there, but we're already there. Now obviously our goal, like every other college team in the country, is to win every game and we haven't done that. But if you look at statistics over the last three years, we're already there. Everyone keeps wondering if there's some magic mountain we're supposed to climb but guess what? We're already there. We're playing at the level of as good a football team as there is in the country. Now I wish people would realize that because for us to get that national recognition, we have to get more people in the stands and more TV ratings and have the people on ESPN say we're good. Even though we're already there, there isn't anybody saying we are. That's reality so nobody thinks we are."

**On the program having players chosen by the league's best professional team like Donnel Pumphrey with the Philadelphia Eagles:**

"Well I think [Donnel] is lucky he was on the championship team. I think the Eagles played really well and had a great year but going into the season, they weren't one of the favorites. So I think he was lucky to be on a good team that didn't have a whole lot of injuries that played really well throughout the entire season. There's my point right there. Since we got four guys go to the combine, we have two guys that were a part of the Eagles organization – Darrell Greene is part of their practice roster – so we have two former Aztecs who were on the World Champion football team and I don't know how many other schools had two on the Eagles. Anybody know? Bet you it's just one or two, but we do. We've got two on the champions."

**On being labeled "Running Back U" and the prospects of recruiting running backs:**

"You would think that [it's easy to recruit running backs], I would think just the opposite. If you go back the last 10 years, almost every one of our running backs got a chance to play in the NFL. Not all of them made it, but they all had a chance. Now what we're finding is they assume we have someone else who's really good here and they want to come and play. Running backs think they should go in and play as freshmen, well now they're looking for a school that doesn't have any running backs and they assume we have some good running backs here already so it's not near as easy as you think. We do run the ball but if you look at our history, we have one guy that gets the ball 25 to 30 times and one guys who gets it 10 to 15. One guy's a senior and one guy's a junior so if I'm a freshman, I want to go someplace where they lost all their running backs."

**On the practice situation in the spring:**

"It's different and kind of exciting, we'll see if our players like the idea. We're remodeling our locker room so it affects the training room, the equipment room and our players have no place to dress or shower or any of that so it was going to be like Pop Warner days where they would take their uniforms home but they don't have anyone to wash them. So they'd be walking down the street carrying their helmet and their pads and their cleats to practice. So we're going to use the old Charger practice site. We're going to lease that for a month that we have 15 practices in. We're using their locker rooms, fields and training rooms. The city was nice enough to lease it to us so it's a change of scenery, might be a whole lot of fun. All the goal posts are gone and all the taping rooms in the training room are gone too, where'd they go?"

**On how the facility looks:**

"I don't know how it's looking now. When we looked 10 days ago, it looked kind of beat up but they assured us they're going to clean it up. The field didn't look very good but if you've seen our practice field after the last four or five games of the season, ours doesn't look very good either. And they've got a 60 yard turf field so we'll find a way to practice."

**On if the fan base can get in there for practice much like the Chargers did:**

"That's not up to us just like maintaining the fields is not up to us. That's a city run spot just like the stadium is."

**On Carson Baker from Helix HS:**

"I think everybody we signed, including the local guys, we signed for a reason because there is an open spot in our formula. We have a formula with how many players play that position and if everything was perfect, [the depth chart] would be senior, junior, sophomore and freshman. Obviously, nothing is perfect and we wanted another scholarship quarterback. We had one with us last year as a freshman who decided to stay home in Texas so that made us have a spot open for a young quarterback. We had one we had watched but we hadn't been scouting quarterbacks as heavily until we found out the young man from Texas wasn't coming back. Then we always evaluate the local kids first and we thought he was a really good player so there was no reason to go any other place if we can convince him to come here."

**On if the team has lost anybody else due to opting out:**

"We haven't had anybody opt out yet. We have some guys who, due to injuries, we don't know if they are going to be able to play yet. There are a couple that could be medical, two of them are going to try to go through spring practice and we'll find out real early if they are going to be able to play."

**On Zidane Thomas from Arizona:**

"See there's an interesting story. We tried to recruit him from Day 1 and he committed to one school, then got a lot of interest from other schools so he de-committed. He committed to another school in a Power 5 league, but they dropped him. Then he tried to commit to another Power 5 school that didn't have a scholarship for him right now but they could gray shirt him so he wouldn't come to school until January, he didn't like that idea. All of a sudden we were recruiting a running back to sign and we didn't have one so it's funny how sometimes that stuff works out. We recruited him back in December, so his high school coach contacted us and that's how we got him. He's a pretty good all-around running back and was a highly recruited guy, it just didn't go the way he wanted it to."

**On the players at the NFL Combine:**

"I think it says more about the players than our program and I'd like to remember how heavily those guys were recruited. Not very heavily, I don't think any of those guys had Power 5 offers. They were excellent high school players who didn't get the credit that they deserved and they came here and decided to prove to everybody else that they didn't get the credit that they deserved. They put the time and effort into developing their skills and had the right team attitude and they progressed through their college career and now they're potential NFL football players. It's as much them as anything we do and the parents that raised them because they come with the right attitude and they want to be good and nothing is going to stop them from being good and we're lucky to have them."

**On if the recruiting rankings are biased toward the Power 5 schools:**

"The ratings themselves are biased toward the Power 5 and to be honest with you, we don't give a darn how many stars they have beside their name because that us all related to services that spend money to rate those guys a certain way. They ask the Power 5

recruiting coordinators who they are going to recruit and those guys get more stars than the other guys, that's the way it works. Most of the time those guys are really good players. In my opinion, we had the best running back in the country last year [and] I think maybe he was a three star guy, maybe, could have been a two star guy. Does that mean they all made a mistake and we were just lucky or the star system is a bunch of baloney?"

**On the relief that recruiting is over:**

"It's always nice to have recruiting over because it's kind of intense. It won't be the most important decision of their lives, but it's very important. Where they are going to continue their education and maybe their football career. It's hard on coaches who are away from home a lot trying to convince young people to come to their program. It's a very difficult job. Head coaches are lucky because there are rules against us doing a lot of it so assistant coaches are working their fannies off and it gets very intense towards signing day. I'm sure they are a lot more relieved than I am because they do most the work."

**On the earlier signing date this year:**

"I'm sure a lot of us didn't know how many guys were going to sign in December and by far the majority of recruits out there signed in December. I think that the process is sped up with technology, I mean we've got a list of sophomores we're watching who are going to be juniors next year. So because you can see all their film on the computer, you're able to evaluate them quicker and better on whether they can play or not. Now all your time is spent on what kind of kids they are and what kinds of grades they get and all that kind of stuff. You don't have to hunt around for film or have it mailed to you, it's all done so quickly that the process is a lot faster, so I think it's easier to evaluate the kids you like and get them signed early."

**On if TJ Sullivan is on campus:**

"Yeah he will be at spring practice. He is the only one (that will practice)."

**On a possible spring game for fans:**

"We're going to try and have a spring game, we don't know where it's going to be yet. It's going to be hard to have it here because when we wanted to have it, the NCAA Regional Tournament is here on campus so it's almost impossible to have it here. In order to have it at Murphy Canyon, you'd have to bring it bleachers and everything else. We have taken it off campus before and take it to a high school or junior college, we might do that. It hasn't been decided yet."

**-SDSU-**