

## Chargers Week 8 Media Availability

Wednesday, October 25, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On Bears QB Tyson Bagent's performance last week:**

"I saw a winning performance. I thought that he played really well. I thought that he operated the offense and did exactly what [Bears Offensive Coordinator] Luke [Getsy] is asking him to do. I thought that he played with a lot of confidence. You could see, as the game went on, he played with more and more confidence and made more and more plays. They operated their offense. They did not keep anything simple for him. I feel like they ran the offense that they believe in. Again, it was a winning performance."

#### **On Bagent 'making it to the NFL' from Division II:**

"The quarterback position, that position itself, it's tough to make it in the NFL, but I think that it just shows you that, like the old saying, if you're good enough, the NFL will find you. This guy is one of the most decorated college players, regardless of the level. He was a record-setting quarterback and accomplished a lot as a quarterback. He was a Senior Bowl participant, which is the most prestigious college all-star game. He had a tremendous college career. We did a lot of work on him. You saw why in his first game. I thought that he came in, in the Minnesota game, and played a quality game, too, and gave their team a chance to win in that game. Then, in the preseason, certainly, he had to beat a lot of people out to become the second quarterback for Chicago. He has our full respect."

#### **On preparing for a quarterback 'with just one NFL start' compared to a veteran:**

"I think that you have a little bit bigger body of work on the player. To see him have a full start against a quality team, a team that we know, I think gives you a sense of the menu that they are willing to give him. Then, I think you get a really good sense of just his overall ability, his athleticism, pocket presence, arm strength, all of that good stuff. A big win for them at home against the Raiders, and the Raiders are coming off that big win, so it was a team that was playing well. For them to play like that, it was a winning performance for them."

#### **On if WR Joshua Palmer's knee injury 'popped up following the game':**

"Yes."

#### **On RB Austin Ekeler:**

"Full participant in practice today."

#### **On if Palmer 'will miss all week':**

"I don't know that. Day-to-day kind of thing. We'll know more as the week goes on."

**On evaluating Bagent:**

"I think that our college scouting department and our pro personnel department do a great job in the advances of making us aware of all of that. Certainly, I did the work on the quarterbacks coming out. We have a good idea of his ability. but you're really getting to see him in pro football. The preseason games, and then the two games that he has played in, that is going to give you the truest measurement of who he is and what he is capable of. He is off to a good start for them."

**On if Bagent was 'on the radar' during the evaluation process:**

"You take a good look at all of the quarterbacks. But, even if you're looking at other positions, you are seeing him at the Senior Bowl — whether it's in one-on-ones or in the seven-on-sevens or the actual team reps. You go back to what you saw back then, and then his performances, so far, in the NFL, you see a player that belongs and that is good enough to play quarterback in the NFL."

**On the process of 'making in-game adjustments':**

"It's game-to-game, it's series-to-series. Sometimes, there are adjustments that happen within a series, when you go to the bench. There are some times where it can happen during a playcall, where I'm giving K9 [LB Kenneth Murray Jr.] a reminder to let the guys know that you can make an adjustment. It's that quick, where it's happening truly in the moment. Then, there are some times where you go in at halftime and you have time to make some. But, every case is different. I just think that when you need to or you feel like it is going to give you an advantage, you want to be able to communicate it and, hopefully, get it done. Since I've been here, we've had to do that throughout my time here, in all of those instances that I mentioned. That's what good teams do."

**On balancing the decision-making process:**

"You have chapters in your gameplan that maybe you have ready, you don't know if you are going to need them, or if you're going to be able to use them — whether it's health or personnel-oriented. But, I think that once the game starts, you have a pretty strong sense of what you need to do and how you need to do it. That is what you have to be able to do, though, with your guys. You have to be able to communicate it clearly so that they can go operate. You have to trust that every day we operate like this, every day we're making adjustments, not just at the game. Our guys, we're a close group in all three phases. I think that we've had to do that in all three phases of our team so far this year."

**On TE Tre' McKitty being listed as inactive last week:**

"It was one of those that was more reflective of the type of game that it was. We're pleased with Tre' [McKitty]. I think that he has made big progress on special teams with [Special Teams Coordinator] Ryan [Ficken]. He just needs to stay intact."

**On an update regarding TE Gerald Everett's injury:**

"Day-to-day."

**On how he is 'holding up personally':**

"Like a competitor. You have to make sure that you start with yourself and take full responsibility. I haven't done a good enough job. With that said, we're six games into it and we have 11 left, for sure, and that is what we need to focus on — what is in front of us, not what is behind us. I thought that we had a good practice today. It was fresh, it was focused. Guys had the right mindset. The NFL is about making adjustments. There is going to be a stretch like this at some point in your season. What I've learned is that every time that you start an NFL season or head towards one, there is going to be a point where you need to make adjustments. We're at a point right now where we have to perform better. But, it really starts in practice. I like what I saw today."

**On C Will Clapp's performance:**

"He's a consistent player. He has command of the gameplan, communicates really well. He's as tough as they come. When you're talking about a backup center, he has given us winning play and giving us a chance to compete. These have been two close games against two really good fronts. You're talking about [Chiefs DT] Chris Jones and that group of inside players, and then Dallas that has a bunch of quality inside guys, and we're right there at the end of the game with a chance to win. That's what you want from your backup, is that he gives you a chance to win every game. That's what Will [Clapp] does for us, he is a stud."

**On the offensive line's performance:**

"We haven't been consistent enough. In the last game, I liked the way that we responded in the run game. I felt like we had a quality run game performance. I felt like it was definitely good enough for us to win the game. We were explosive in the run game. I thought our guys came off the ball. The second half, I thought we faded a little bit in that phase. This line is going to continue to get better. There are a lot of young guys in that group, as you know, three really young ones — and [T] Trey [Pipkins III] and Will [Clapp] being the older guys — but the more that group plays together, the better it is going to get, but we like coaching that group."

**On what has 'led to protection issues':**

"It's a combination. It usually is, not always, but it usually is. Pressure percentage, and then the outcome, those two things are different. But, we know that this year, when we've run the football, that is when we've had our chance to be most explosive. I think the more consistent we are running the football, the more balance it creates. Then, in the passing game, any time you're in a known-passing situation against a team who can rush or pressure, blitz, it's going to be tough in the NFL. That's why, on first and second down, you have to continue to stay ahead, be explosive, stay out of third down on known pass, where that pressure can be tough."

**On the Bears' previous losing streak:**

"They played really hard the whole way. That's what I see. That's a team that consistently plays hard. They made a lot of big additions to their team in the offseason, free agency wise — trading for [Bears WR] DJ Moore. I think that they have drafted a lot of really good players. They've handled the injury to [Bears QB] Justin [Fields], I think, well. It's difficult to overcome losing your quarterback. I think that they've showed really good resilience. But, their games have all been close. To me, when I watch them play, their record could be much different. I think the consistency of how hard they play, I think they're trying to play the game the right way. Offensively, they're one of the top rushing attacks in the league. They rushed for 170 yards without Justin [Fields] as their quarterback last week. They have run the football at a high level. On defense, they attack the ball. They pursue the ball at a high level, they attack the ball at the high level. They're dangerous on special teams because they have a lot of good returners, and a lot of guys who are dangerous with the ball in our hands. I see a really good football team and I think that's what the tape shows. Now, they've been able to win a few games and get that confidence."

**On how 'active' he expects the team to be at the upcoming trade deadline:**

"Just like every season, we'll be there with the other 31 teams trying to do what's best for our team."

**On getting his 'coaching start' in the NFL with the Bears and at the college level with NIU and what that means to him:**

"I'll always cherish my time in Chicago. I'll always be grateful to the McCaskey family, [Chairman] George and Barb were great to my wife and I, and [Bears Senior Advisor] Ted Phillips. I couldn't be more grateful for them for giving me an opportunity, as a young college coach. We accomplished a lot there. I think when we won the [NFC North] Division in 2018, they hadn't done that a long time. That was a special year. We didn't get off to a good start that year — it was a tough start to that year, as a matter of fact — but that was a special group of guys. We accomplished a lot, the number one defense [in the NFL]. That was a special group of players and coaches. The ownership meant a lot to me."

**On 'handling the emotions' of facing a former team:**

"You just have to focus on what is on the field. What is off the field, that is kind of for everybody else. Your focus, as a competitor, is what is on the field. That football team has our full attention. We're getting ready for their players, they have so many good ones. It's going to be a tough game on Sunday night."

## **QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**

### **On what is on his finger:**

"It's the same thing [as before]. It's just there's some tap on it."

### **On wearing a glove on his left hand:**

"I think that's just something to talk to the training staff about. It just adds extra protection."

### **On his finger for Sunday against the Bears:**

"I haven't really thought about that yet. I think every day it's getting better. We're coming up on four weeks, so just doing everything I can to limit the pain and make sure I'm out here being safe."

### **On wearing a glove on his left hand:**

"I don't think it makes too much of a difference. I think, with the off-hand, it helps with grip. It helps with being able to control the ball. As long as it's not my right hand, I think we're okay."

### **On the offense without C Corey Linsley and WR Mike Williams:**

"It's definitely tough losing two guys like that. They're about as good as it gets. They're veterans in this league that have had a bunch of success. Any time you lose a guy like Mike or Corey, it's going to be tough. We're thankful for the guys that have stepped up. We found out a lot about the guys that we have behind them. We've got complete faith and confidence in those guys, especially [C/G/] Will [Clapp] and [WR Quentin] Q [Johnston]. It's been good to see those guys stepping up."

### **On taking snaps with C/G Will Clapp:**

"It's been awesome. I've taken a bunch of snaps with Will, so we feel really comfortable with him."

### **On when his finger was affected against the Chiefs:**

"It actually was on a hand-off. The glove — we made it a size bigger for the middle finger. We sewed it back on and it ripped off. It came off with the cast. I threw it to the sideline and went and got it fixed up after the drive."

### **On the glove he wore against the Chiefs:**

"It was a glove, we took off the middle finger and added it a size bigger. It was a 3X glove with a 4X middle finger so I could fit it over the cast. When I handed the ball off, it got stuck on the ball and it ripped off, and it took everything off with it."

### **On if the plan for his finger this week will be similar to last week:**

"It didn't work, so I think we're probably going to have to switch it. That's something we'll figure out in the next couple of days."

### **On wearing a glove on his left hand:**

"Since I don't have the middle finger full strength-wise, the grip on the ball is the important part of having the glove where you're able to control it. The pocket gets tight, so being able to grip it and hold onto the ball is the toughest part without the middle finger. I think that's kind of helpful for the games. For practice, right now, where I know I'm not going to get hit — or at least I shouldn't — I think the tape and being able to keep it cast up, helps."

### **On if wearing a glove on his left hand affects where he takes snaps:**

"The glove, I don't think, has a whole lot of impact on under center or in the gun. I think it's more so just being able to grip the ball. Going under center with the glove, I think it helps because you have that extra grip, so the ball is able to kind of grip into that. I don't think there's too much of a difference between under center or in the gun."

**On if he 'plans on doing all hand-offs with the right hand':**

"No, that was because I didn't have anything on my middle finger. That was the drive where it came off. Just wanted to be safe with it."

**On the plan for his finger this week:**

"I think that's something that we'll have to discuss in the next couple of days. It didn't work out on Sunday. We'll get back to the drawing board and find something that works."

**On what the team did after the middle finger came off against the Chiefs:**

"The glove part came off, not my middle finger [*laughter*]. I threw it to the sideline, came off to the sideline, finished that drive without anything on it. We put a couple more casts on it, taped it back up and then put a glove over the top of that. We didn't have the special-made glove."

**On if it was a 'regular glove' that he wore after replacing the glove:**

"It was just a regular glove at that point, yes."

**On if the 'regular glove' fit over his finger:**

"We had to kind of adjust a little bit, but we made it work."

**On the game against the Chiefs:**

"I thought there were some good things. I thought there were a lot of things that we could improve. It's tough because we haven't been at our best. We have to be realistic and real about it. I know that we have the ability to play really good football. It's a bummer that it hasn't worked out for us so far, where the offense hasn't played great when the defense is playing great. So, it's on us to be more consistent, to understand that it is a tough situation. We have the guys that are continuing to work and we have the talent. We just need to find a way to make it work, not point fingers and understand that we're in this position. It's the players out there that need to be better, but I'm thankful for these guys in this locker room. We had a great day of practice. We're looking forward to the challenge this week."

**On if he draws on the experience of last season:**

"I think, any time you go through adversity like that, that you're going to learn. You're going to get a lot of experience from it. We have a lot of guys on this team that have been through things like that before. They're fighting through injuries. I know it's Week 7 or 8, I'm not quite sure, but it's the NFL. That's the tough part about it. You have to keep answering, you have to keep fighting. No one in that locker room is down. No one is worried or panicking. We have to get this thing going. We know that we have the guys to be able to get it done."

**On the past few games:**

"I think there's a lot of things that we can get better at. We've missed some opportunities. I've missed some opportunities. It starts with us getting better and understanding that we're in this position. I think that the coaches have done a great job of putting us in positions to win and positions to succeed. It's on us, as players. It's on me. We're not going to point any fingers. We're going to get better because of it. There's a lot of football left. I feel really thankful and fortunate to be in this locker room with these guys. They're professionals. We're looking forward to the challenge."

**On particular incomplete passes to WR Keenan Allen this season:**

"I've just missed them. Those are throws that I know that I can make. I've missed them. That's what it is. It's nothing other than I missed them. I'd love to be perfect and would love to make every throw. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to do that. I'll continue to work, get better and do everything I can to make sure that I don't let that happen again. He's an incredible receiver, runs great routes. It's on me to be able to deliver the ball."

**On the Bears' defense:**

"They've been able to force some turnovers. They've done a really good job of getting after the passer. They have some really athletic guys on that side of the ball. They're well-coached. We've been watching a lot of film and doing everything we can to get ready for them."

**On the offensive production in the second half being due to execution or defensive adjustments:**

"I think it's a little bit of both. I think that we can always be better, as an offense. There are definitely plays and situations that we go back and look at, and say, 'Hey, we could have done this differently. We could have been better here or there.' At the end of the day, it's on us. It's on us as players to go out there and complete passes, to block, to run. To do all of those things. It's on us to be more consistent."

## **SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.**

### **On the Chiefs game:**

"We didn't get off to a fast start. We didn't come out and play the game how it needed to be played in the beginning. We gave up too many yards, too many points in the beginning and kind of settled in the second half. Can't wait until the second half, though."

### **On what to improve on moving forward:**

"We have to go out and do our job. We need to focus a little more, lock in and do our job."

### **On making changes to the defense during halftime:**

"The games always present an opportunity where you have to change the defense. When you're going against man, it also presents a challenge against a quarterback that can run, too. You saw a couple times he got away on those third-and-longs, scrambling with his legs. When you play man it's always that aspect of it, too. We have to be able to play both. We have to be able to play zone, we have to be able to play man and go out there and execute."

### **On Bears QB Tyson Bagent:**

"A lot of confidence. It looks like he's having fun. It looks like they believe in him, too, by the plays that they're calling. We've got to be ready. Anybody that has confidence in this league, you have to be ready. We have to come get the W on Sunday."

### **On the challenge of a rookie quarterback:**

"No fear. They don't have anything to lose. If I'm a young player coming out there, like, 'I'm new, I'm fresh. I've got nothing to lose. I'm just trying to go out there and get a win.' We have to be ready for that."

### **On preparing for Bagent with little NFL film:**

"It's the NFL, we watch everything. I'm pretty sure we're scouting everything, watching everything. It's the NFL."

### **On facing the Bears and Bagent:**

"You have to take it seriously because they just beat one of your division opponents last week. They had a lot of rushing yards and a lot of passing yards. You can't take anybody lightly in this league or you'll get humbled. We have to come out, execute and be ready to play on Sunday night."

### **On Bears WR DJ Moore:**

"Baller. Been a fan of [WR] DJ Moore. He's good after the catch, yards after the catch. So, we have to know where he's at all times and be able to get him to the ground if he does catch the ball."

### **On Bears TE Cole Kmet:**

"Tall, a guy that can block very well. He can get open. They like him a lot over there. He's one of the top targets, so we have to be ready."