



Josh.Rupprecht@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jennifer.Rojas@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jamaal.LaFrance@chargers.nfl.com

Brock.Anderson@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Danny.Markino@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jordan.Colquitt@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Leonie.Strehl@chargers.nfl.com

## Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Friday, July 29, 2022 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On if 'the intensity picked up today' at practice:**

"I thought that it was a really competitive practice. I liked the first two practices, but today you added third downs and those types of situations. I think it will bring out the best in people. We had a great crowd, which, I think, brings out the best in the group, too. I felt like it was a very, very competitive day on both sides."

#### **On 'if there is an update available' regarding S Derwin James Jr.'s contract:**

"Not yet. Same comment as the first day. Just being patient with the process. It's just part of the NFL. We're working through it."

#### **On a particular time that he would like to see James Jr. return to practicing:**

"I don't know. Derwin [James Jr.] has played so much NFL football. He's probably the least of our concerns. We're going to just let this process play out. As I mentioned, and I believe it's true, it's just part of the NFL — when you're dealing with some of the best players and contracts like this, it takes some time. We're working through it."

#### **On going through a player's contract situation for the first time as a head coach:**

"I went through it with [Rams CB] Jalen [Ramsey] a little bit when I was with the Rams. It's communication on both sides. That's the thing about Derwin, as you guys see, he hasn't changed a bit, we haven't changed a bit. For us, and for the players, it's normal. He's himself, and that makes it really special for me, not making it a tough situation."

#### **On the offense's 'response' during team periods:**

"There was definitely a response today. That's a really good group. I think what happened out there today was our group on offense came out and, I thought, really delivered in the first team period. Then, what that did for the rest of practice, it set off a bunch of really high-level football on both sides. That's what I expect. When you have two squads that are evenly matched, you're going to have a lot of back-and-forth. As a coach, I thought that that was fun to watch. I felt like we put on a good show for the fans today."

#### **On OLB Kyle Van Noy practicing at inside linebacker:**

"I think we're just at the beginning with Kyle. I think he's capable of so much. We're going to use this training camp to figure out the best role for him. Fortunate for us, he can play so many places. I've really enjoyed teaming up with this guy. This guy is really, really special. I think you see, through three practices, the impact that he has had on our team, on our defense. I'm really excited to team up with him, for sure."

#### **On if it is 'reading it wrong' that LB Kenneth Murray Jr. has 'went down' with his recovery:**

"Reading it wrong. He's on track. He is really progressing. He's great on schedule in terms of what we see for him. It's just going to be some time, it's going to be some time before he gets back out there. There haven't been any setbacks just yet. He's working hard."

**On DB Mark Webb Jr.:**

“Like I said last year, he was really playing well for us before he got hurt last year. I think that he would have played significantly down the stretch for us. He has a lot of versatility to play Safety, Star, Money. He played Star at Georgia. Really excited about his progress. He’s worked really hard to get back. He definitely fits that role, so we’re going to let him compete. It’s great for him to be able to prove himself and show what he can do. At the same time, the biggest job description of him is being able to tackle, too. We haven’t done that just yet. That’s going to be what he needs to prove in the NFL because he has outstanding skills in the passing game, but he needs to prove himself as a tackler.”

**On the competition for the second running back role:**

“We’re not going to know about these backs until they get tackled. Until pads come on, I don’t think that you can make any assessment on a back. We’ll see until pads come on. As it relates to [RB] Austin [Ekeler], I don’t see his role changing any time soon. Hopefully, we can do even more with him. He’s in the best shape of his life and he looks fantastic through three days. As it relates to all of the other guys, we have five other guys that are competing. A lot of it is going to be what happens when the pads go on, and then in special teams. We’re going to give them every opportunity to prove themselves. That’s what this training camp is going to be about for that position.”

**On Webb:**

“He went into Georgia as a receiver, and then [Georgia Head Coach] Kirby [Smart] and those guys moved him inside and played in that Star/Money hybrid role. They had so many good DBs there — in his class, I think that they had five guys drafted that year. Mark played everywhere for them. Kind of like in the NFL, they had a lot of NFL DBs in that secondary, so he played in a lot of places. It showed us that not only does he have the skillset, but he also has how his mind works. Just because you have the skillset doesn’t mean that your mind can allow you to play in there. He has that combination. Hopefully, he can sustain that throughout training camp.”

**On expectations for the interior of the defensive line:**

“They just have to be themselves. All of those guys that we acquired through trade or free agency, those guys are proven NFL players. It’s just being themselves. As it relates to what I expect of them, I expect us to play team defense. Last year, that was a weakness of our football team. I don’t expect that to be the case. That’s why all of those guys are here.”

**On the relationship between OLBs Joey Bosa and Khalil Mack:**

“I see a lot of really special things happening that can only happen between two players of that caliber. There are a lot of things that are going on between them that not many people would understand. To see the game through two superstars lenses like that, two of the top players at their position in the last several years, to be teaming up and sharing their stories and what they see, it’s really special. They have really complementary styles and, I think, they have really complementary personalities. I think that opposites attract a little bit, and I think that you’re seeing a little bit of that between them. As a coach, you love to see that. [Outside Linebackers Coach] Giff Smith is doing a great job coaching them. They’re really doing a really good job with the younger players, too. They’re sharing that wisdom. That leadership between both of them is going to help us out a lot.”

**On adding players who have won a Super Bowl:**

“I don’t think that you can ever minimize that impact on your football team. When you have players on your team who have been impact players in winning a world championship — and in some of these guys’ cases, multiple championships — and have been a part of multiple playoff games in premium environments. When you’re on a Super Bowl championship team, you’re playing a premium schedule. You know week in and week out in the NFL, it’s not just about that last game, it’s about the entire journey to get there. Those guys know about the journey to get there, what it takes on a day-to-day basis, and that mindset that you need to have every single day in order to do that. It’s not any one thing, it’s a lot of little things that happen all of the time. I’m really glad that they’re here because they’re going to help us in a big way.”

**On what he has seen out of S JT Woods thus far:**

“Range. Real speed. He can really see. Where he has to prove himself, in the NFL, is how physical he is going to be — how physical is he going to be as a contact player? Not only contact as a tackler, but contact against really, really good receivers — big receivers and big tight ends that are going to be physical in the move area. That remains to be seen, but we really like coaching him. He is in an awesome DB environment — [Assistant Secondary Coach] Tommy Donatell, [Secondary Coach] D.A. [Derrick Ansley] and [Defensive Coordinator] R-Hill [Renaldo Hill] back there coaching him. He’s with one of the top safeties in the game in Derwin every day. Nas [S Nasir Adderley] is really doing a great job with him, too. Nas has made big improvements, as you guys know. He’s in a really good environment. We just expect him to continue to improve because he has a lot of really good stuff, but we’re not going to know anything about him until we put pads on.”

**On his second training camp as head coach:**

“In better rhythm. There’s just so much more confidence when you come to the practice field. I know who I’m working with — and it’s not just the players and coaches, it’s our entire sports performance team, it’s you guys. I think that you have that full confidence when you come to the field and I think that allows you to be your best. It allows you to figure things out a lot better because there is so much to figure out. I’m excited about where we are and I expect us to continue to improve.”

**On how QB Justin Herbert ‘is handling heightened expectations’:**

“He’s just so steady. He’s handling it like he did the first time I met him. He’s a fierce competitor. His intangibles are by far his best quality, the head that he has on his shoulders. There is nobody’s standards that will ever, ever meet his own. That’s what makes him such a good player and such a good teammate. He knows how important it is to be one of the guys. I think that’s why his teammates and his coaches appreciate him so much because it’s never about him. He wants it to be about our team, our unit on offense, our fans. When you have a humble superstar like him, it sure helps.”

**On Special Teams Coordinator Ryan Ficken and the special teams units’ performance thus far:**

“Ryan Ficken and [Assistant Special Teams Coach] Chris Gould teaming up, I really like the way that our drills are organized. I like the way that our guys are competing. I think, from a teaching standpoint, our guys have really bought into the way that these guys teach. They really fit into our coaching staff on offense and defense, and I think that is really important. I know that they’ve also fit in well with [General Manager] Tom Telesco and our scouting staff. You really have to be able to team up to put the back half of the roster together. They have a lot of really good evaluation qualities. Ryan was an offensive coach, so he has an offensive coaching background, as well. I just think that he has a really good pedigree. He’s fit in really well with the staff. Hopefully, we’ll continue to improve as we go.”

**On DB Deane Leonard:**

“Our scouting department and our coaching staff deserve a lot of credit. We had a lot of late-round picks. I think Ja [S Ja’Sir Taylor] and Deane [Leonard] are two good examples of it, Mark Webb [Jr.] is a good example of it, guys that we’ve gotten in the late rounds of the draft. Deane has a really good head on his shoulders. He’s a competitor. Has good bloodlines, his dad was a player in the CFL. He’s fast. He has good size. He learns well. He’s not afraid. He will get up there and get on you, play bump-and-run. He’s shown that he can handle it. Hopefully, this training camp, he is going to get a chance to get out there and compete in practices and games. We like coaching him, for sure. He has a chance.”

**On DL Andrew Brown not practicing today:**

“He had a little bit of an ankle. He’s day-to-day. Nothing serious, but just day-to-day.”

**On TE Gerald Everett’s involvement in the offense today:**

“Gerald’s been awesome to work with. I was able to be with him on the other side of the ball at the Rams, so I got a good snapshot of who he was as a player. He’s fit right in with our offense. I know that our quarterbacks love throwing to him. He’s a hard worker. One thing that people don’t realize about him is that he is a really willing blocker. He has real toughness at the point of attack. He has the versatility to move in different places. He has a good run-after-catch ability. He’s fit right in with our group. [Tight Ends Coach] Kevin Koger is doing a really good job coaching him. I’m excited to see him add a dimension to our offense. We’ll see it take shape here in camp.”

## **RUNNING BACK AUSTIN EKELER**

### **On today's practice:**

"I think it's how you would expect a Day 3 to go. A little bit of thinking, we're starting to pick up our intensity as we're getting more familiar and getting back into the rhythm of football. Just getting back on our feet takes a little bit. The intensity today was the highest that it's been, so that's good. That means people are starting to understand, people are starting to feel like themselves again, and so the competition is rising before we get into pads."

### **On 'if he can tell how good players will be based on practices without pads':**

"Yeah, you can. I think you can through just the way people move, their fluidity in their role, if they're using the right technique, things like that. That will always show up because I mean that's what football is. It comes down to your fundamentals. And then you have to pair the mental part with the fundamentals. Most of the fundamentals are just being in the right position, the right stance, being in the right spot. The aspect that we don't get right now is just obviously the tackling part, but you've got to put yourself in a position to be able to tackle before you can even tackle. You can definitely tell."

### **On if he needs to be tackled in training camp to prepare for the season:**

"There's an aspect where you would like to be taken to the ground and have real-life football. I think that's what the preseason is for the most part, especially for the younger guys. You can never really simulate that aspect of breaking tackles, 'Did he get me? Did he not?' The DB is running by going like this and everyone is cheering and we're on the offense like, 'Oh no, we made him miss.' So, there's that aspect that you can't get around. I would like to, but at the same time, I understand the liability aspect of that and pushing that off as far as we can. For now, we'll play everything up until the thud."

### **On what he's seen from the running back group thus far:**

"It's been competitive. These guys are on it as far as the mental part. Now it just comes down to a few things. Obviously, continuing to progress in the offense, but then it's going to come down to special teams as well. I remember that being a big part of the reason why I made the team and was able to stay on the team in my younger years was my value on special teams. It's the more you can bring to the table as far as you as a player, not only on offense, but mainly on special teams, especially if you are in that third spot. That's going to make the difference. And so, I haven't been able to see them as much on special teams, but as far as on offense, they all have their different styles and they do them very well. So, I think they'll succeed at the running back spot in their way, but then it comes down to, like I said, the other value on special teams."

### **On 'how much better the defense has made the offense':**

"We've already got [OLB Khalil] Mack out here. He's obviously one of the bigger names we've brought in and he's already being disruptive. I'm figuring out his play style. He's going to jump around, try to get inside of our tackles and our tight ends and set an edge on you really quick. So, we're going to have to have a plan to deal with him, which we're starting to coordinate. Then, [CB] J.C. [Jackson], I haven't seen him as much, obviously he's outside on the edge. But yeah, just seeing what our defense has kind of turned into over the past couple of years, going from [former Chargers Head] Coach [Anthony] Lynn's style under that coaching to what we've got to [Head Coach] Brandon Staley. I see a lot bigger bodies in the box. So, I like to see that too because as a runner, I'm like, 'Man, we've got a lot of people in here. There's a lot of big bodies that we've got to try to run through.' It's a little bit tougher on the run game in my opinion. So, I'm excited to see how that plays out."



**On 'if he can accept the running backs behind him pushing for the starting role':**

"It's my job to add as much value as I can. Not only in the running back spot, but out in the slot and kind of all over the field. I think that's where I have a lot of value in my game is you can pretty much put me wherever and I'll have some type of value on the runs deep down the field, speed, whether you want me running across the middle or whether you want to hand the ball to me, throw the ball to me, have me as a decoy going one way for a screen type of thing. I'm going to be efficient wherever you put me. If we've got a guy who's shown that he's a predominant runner, can really pound the rock and is really strong at that, maybe stronger than I am, then it's like we can still see him, but I still see myself being on the field at the same time. I even remember — I think it was year three — when [former Chargers and current Broncos RB] Melvin Gordon [III] and I were really splitting carries. A lot of the time, we would be on the field at the same time. You just want the best players at the right time and the right situation. And so, it's my job, like I said, to make sure my value is still understood out here and try to add as much. As far as my load, yeah, maybe it could be altered a little bit, but I don't think it'll go down. I think it will just look a little bit different if anything."

**On what the offense looks like with QB Justin Herbert entering his second year in the offensive system:**

"I see growth with him, just some little things. Like out at practice, after we'll get done with a team period, he'll come over and talk to us now. Like, 'Hey, what did you see on this?' Like, 'Hey, I ran a shallow cross today, where I should have done what I didn't do.' He's like, 'Hey, how did you see that?' That's growth that he wouldn't have done in the past. So, he's starting, I think, to understand the scheme and have some comfortability in coming up and talking to the guys like, 'Hey, let's get on the same page just to make sure we see this differently because I was expecting you to do something else.' I think that's just with time. I think I saw something where this is the first time he's had the same offensive coordinator in back-to-back years. That's crazy. I'm glad we have that for him just because now, like you said, Football 2.0. He's able to catch on a little bit quicker and build from what he's built on in the past."

**On if Herbert 'has access to a bigger playbook' from having the scheme in consecutive seasons:**

"I think it's a trust, and it's a trust from three different people. Myself, just being able to know that I can do more as far as adjustments on the fly. It's a trust in [QB] Justin [Herbert] to trust me that I'll actually understand and be on the same page as him mentally, what he's trying to do. And, a trust with [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] to actually be able to call certain things where I can have some types of options. I think you see that a lot with [WR] Keenan [Allen] and Justin himself where he's starting to understand and maybe be able to change routes now a little bit more comfortably and actually understand, 'OK, we're getting a look where what we had wasn't the best opportunity. Hey, check it to this.' That's something that's not called in the huddle. That's something that's just from straight up football recognition. I think that's where the real growth starts to become — and that's what I remember seeing with [former Chargers QB] Philip [Rivers], we had all of these different checks and different hand signals and things like that because he would call the play, and then you remember Philip. He would be changing. He would be yelling at people, yelling at [former Chargers TE Antonio] Gates to get lined up over, change the play. And so, it takes time. Football is tough. It's a lot of the same stuff, but it's all disguised. It just comes down to mental recognition. We don't have a lot of time, like three, four, five seconds, you're scanning, you need to make a decision. Going back to your question, for me, it comes down to, 'Am I comfortable in what we have right now?' And then, 'Is there an opportunity for growth?' And I'm actually taking advantage and showing that I can do that."

**On what he's shared with the running back group on how to become better special teams players:**

"For me, when I had special teams, that was pretty much the only reps I got at practice. So, that was like my whole livelihood. And so, I put everything into that. There was nothing else I could have done more as far as what I was putting into the preparation from a special teams period. It wasn't even like I was on the special teams. That was scout team special teams. And so, it came down to me putting the maximum effort, taking it as seriously as I possibly could and try to get some type of — whether it was I'm giving them a look and it was 100 percent, I was untouchable. Like, I'm giving them a real look that is real game speed for me because that was my opportunity. And so, all of them should see that as an opportunity to make the team and just stay in the League. If you can provide special teams play, you're going to have some type of role on any team because you can always, I think, have a little bit longer time to develop in the offense and defense positions. But, you've got to get your reps up as far as when it comes to game time. And a lot of the time, it comes down to special teams. So, that would be my advice is, 'You better make sure you're putting maximum effort in general, but especially on special teams,' because a lot of us didn't play that in college."

**On 'if he takes the defense playing with more energy personally':**

"Yeah, absolutely. Every day is a challenge for us. Every day is an opportunity. We have a situation, today was third downs, so we know we're going to see some pressures, we're going to see some man-to-man's, especially on third-down days. Competition is a little bit higher because we are going to see who's able to make someone miss, who's able to make their one-on-ones. That's where a lot of the money is made on the offensive and defensive side of the ball. Especially on days like today and as we're starting to get into some more pads and we're starting to get more familiar with everything, it's starting to pick up. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley said at the end of practice, 'When you have a well-balanced offense and defense, there's not going to be any blowouts. It's going to be tiny wins here and there.' We've been seeing that. Like you said, the defense has come out the first couple of days and got up to an early jump on us, brought the energy. And so, it's not that we have to match that, but we have to pick ourselves up and get into a position where we know we can be as far as a successful offense. And it's good. We like to be challenged. We've got to be challenged. If we're not getting challenged, that's a problem. And then, we have to step up and challenge them back and try to put some pressure on them. It's a back and forth, tug-of-war game, but absolutely we're trying to bring the energy every time."

**On how the offense performed in practice today:**

"For me, from an individual standpoint, just really locked in because I messed up early on and then I get into my head. I'm just like, 'OK, focus, focus, focus.' But, I was able to pull out and actually make some plays there at the end. Worked on some one-on-ones today. [S] Alohi [Gilman] thinks he tackled me. I think I got him with the spin move. We'll have to see that one on film. But, it's just things like that. I just love this game, love this team, being out here on the field. Saw some nice throws down today. O-line was solid in protection, love to see that. I love to see how those guys are working, meshing. New coach with [Offensive Line Coach Brendan Nugent] Nuge, so we're coming together. It's exciting."

## **DEFENSIVE LINEMAN AUSTIN JOHNSON**

### **On his first training camp with the Chargers:**

“It’s been great. Very smooth transition. Very good group with the defense and D-line. It’s been awesome.”

### **On training camp overall:**

“It’s been a normal training camp. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley does a great job of taking care of us. We have a great group. I cannot complain at all.”

### **On the potential of the defense:**

“I think that every group has great potential; we just need to live up to it. Practice every day and get better every day.”

### **On the defensive line unit:**

“I think we expect everybody to bring their best every day and get better every day. Fix the little things so that we can be a great front, great defense, everything.”