

Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Wednesday, August 2, 2023 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the defense:

"I think the guys have really come out with good energy. I think that they are playing together. The play style, that's what we're after, I think we're getting that from the group. I think that the communication has been really solid, front to back. When you have guys like [DL] Sebastian [Joseph-Day] and [LB] Eric [Kendricks] and K9 [LB Kenneth Murray Jr.] and [S] Derwin [James Jr.] and [S] Alohi [Gilman], the communication has been pretty good because the install is heavy at the beginning. I think that group is playing together well, which we need to, especially with who you have to defend every single day. I thought the run game looked good through this first group of practices in the pads and stuff like that. That's also a good start, we just have to continue to communicate and play with technique in the passing game because this group to defend is really good and the guy throwing it [QB Justin Herbert] is really tough to play against."

On WR Mike Williams and T Rashawn Slater 'not participating in the team period near the end of practice':

"Going into the off day, we just wanted to make sure that they got a good start to the practice, then get them a little bit of rest going into the off day."

On if each player did not participate due to rest:

"Yes, just rest."

On if the rest was 'related to each of their injuries last year':

"This is kind of unrelated. The workload, with Rashawn [Slater] at tackle and Mike [Williams] — a receiver, his legs — just stuff like that. Trying to keep them fresh."

On an update on T Trey Pipkins III:

"No updates on Trey [Pipkins III]. You guys have seen him out there. No significant updates."

On if he 'ratcheted up his play calls defensively today':

"Every single day it's been like that. It's been healthy back-and-forth. Yesterday, the offense had a really good day. Today, I thought the defense responded. We went through a lot of good situations today — two-minute, red zone. There was a lot of good things out there on the football field, both days for both sides. I think that's been a bright spot for us. Every time we've gone out for practice, both sides have competed well. Who wins the day has been kind of back and forth, but you're seeing the playmaking and you're seeing the execution. Today, we have some really good situations, too."

On where CB Asante Samuel Jr. 'fits in best':

"Out there for us in one of the starting groups. Asante [Samuel Jr.] in his first two years, he has started every single game of his pro career. There has not been one game that he has been active for that he has not been a starter. He has earned that. He has gotten better and better both years. Going into this training camp, we've been able to see the versatility that we know that he has, but because of our depth and quality, we feel like we can put him in there more. He's really improved inside because it's a position that's difficult to master, especially the way we play. We put a lot on that position. It's not an easy position to play for us. It's a feature position in our defense. He's playing, from a technique standpoint, a lot better because he's in there a lot more. I think you've seen, throughout these practices, him making plays outside and inside. He has to cover the tough guys in both places. He's also done a good job in run support. He just needs to keep improving."

On DB Ja'Sir Taylor:

"Ja [Taylor], much like Asante [Samuel Jr.], just improving a lot. I think you've seen that group of like five cornerbacks that has been with us, they've all made plays. Ja has that versatility, too, to play outside or inside. He has a lot of good experience. There are going to be some tough days out here with this group of receivers. What I like is that they both have good temperament to play DB in the NFL. They have confidence, they have toughness, they can put tough plays away. Then, they make plays out there. Against this group of guys, you're going to give up some plays, but we're interested in seeing the response. Then, the consistency of the play-making. I think he's getting more outside corner work, too, which is good. He played mostly inside last year, so we're trying to get him outside a lot more so that he can play, kind of like Asante, in both places."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.:

"He has had a really quality camp. I think that you're seeing the experience show. His running mate, I think they're a very good tandem. They communicate well together. They play off one another. Kenneth [Murray Jr.] has really good command of our defense and has helped [LB] Eric [Kendricks] in many ways. You've seen more play-making, you've seen the physicality. You've seen the speed that, I think, you guys have seen, at times, but now you're seeing it with a lot more consistency. He's having a very quality camp for us."

On 'selling Kendricks' on joining the Chargers:

"I remember it well. I was at my house and he was in Hawaii [laughter]. I was just excited that we were able to connect because he was always on vacation. I found out at the time that he and his wife were expecting, so there was a lot of things happening for him. He's just the guy that I feel like, there's some times where you just feel like you've known someone a lot longer than you have, and he's one of those players that I had never coached, but I felt like I knew his game. We played against them. A couple of my really good friends coached him. I thought, 'Hey, man, one day, if I get to coach this guy, this would be fantastic.' I think what we just were able to do is listen to one another, get to know each other on a personal level, kind of rewind, take me back to Fresno all the way to now. Take me through some of those games that we played against each other in Minnesota, when I was in Chicago and Denver, even when I was the head coach here. I just think that what he was looking for and what we were looking for was just the perfect fit. I think those stars aligned. An hour flies by and it could have been two or three hours, easy. I didn't want to take him away from his vacation. But I think we knew that we were going to have a special thing and that the fit was right. I think that he was just a piece that we really were looking to add. I think you're seeing why out there, he has all of the intangibles that you're looking for in a commander in the middle; the poise, the communication skills, the confidence, the play style. Then, just as a linebacker, he's a very complete player; key-diagnose, concept-trigger, open-field tackle, box tackler, passing-game blitz. He just brings a lot to the table. He has been a really fun guy to kind of run the show with because your green dot runs the show for your team. When you're competing against Justin Herbert every day in practice, you need somebody that can keep up, so I just felt like Eric would be one of those guys, against the best quarterbacks we have to play, who can keep up and really take our defense to a different level."

On if Kendricks' experience is 'priceless':

"You can't put a price on it. There are just things that he's seen that a lot of these other guys haven't. You just see that confidence because he's been through the big games. He's been through all these tough challenges that you have to face, and not only hasn't been thrown, but he's been one of the top players in his position in the NFL. I think he's had a real impact on our group. We just have to keep working together. There's a long way to go before where we expect to be. But he's just a really good guy to go through the process with."

On if WR Joshua Palmer 'is OK':

"Yeah, he's OK. That slant that he ran in two-minute was unbelievable, if you guys saw that. That was a big time route and catch. He's having a really good camp. I know you guys saw that monster catch yesterday, but that slant that he ran in two-minute was big time."

On what has 'stood out' over the previous two padded practices:

"I thought, on level one, the knockback and the edges were really good. I thought the run-fits and the tackling by the secondary, you didn't see any space or any of those runs where — as you guys are probably observing — where you're like, 'What just happened there? That didn't look great. That didn't feel right.' You didn't have any of those runs, which is normally a good sign. I felt the physicality and I felt the tackling, the aggressiveness from the secondary, where you see the trigger, and then the finish that you're looking for. We have gotten off to a good start. As you guys know, the point of emphasis [tackling] hasn't been nearly good enough, been poor both years, so it's been a big emphasis for us."

On Palmer's 'response':

"We feel like Josh [Palmer] is an elite player. I think that our entire coaching staff would tell you the same. I know that [General Manager] Tom Telesco and [Director of Player Personnel] JoJo [Wooden] would tell you the same. We felt that way coming out [of the Draft]. We were very surprised that he lasted until the third round. What he put on tape against those frontline corners in the SEC that year — with [Broncos CB Pat] Surtain [II] and [Panthers CB] Jaycee Horn and [Jaguars CB] Tyson Campbell and [Packers CB Eric] Stokes — that group of guys that came out that year, if you go watch Josh Palmer against those guys, and then what he did in the Senior Bowl, we felt like he was an elite player. Through two years, he's done a lot for us. Last year, over 70 catches. He's a very complete receiver. You can line him up anywhere. He's outstanding in the release game. He is very strong. I think where he is very improved is his chemistry with Justin [Herbert], the trust factor. Justin will wait for him. Justin now knows where he can hit Josh in that sweet spot. Josh is a very, very complete player. He is a weapon. We're excited to add him because when you do draft Q [WR Quentin Johnston], that makes you really tough to defend."

On Palmer having a high 'sweet spot':

"Well, he proved it the other day [*laughter*]. He hadn't done that recently. I think that's the evolution of a player, just the confidence. Justin [Herbert] knew that pass to a place that the defense couldn't catch it, but he felt like Josh could get there. That type of catch shows you the talent that he has. There are not many people that are making that type of catch. Asante [Samuel Jr.] had him very well-covered. That's a very, very rare type of play that you are going to see. That doesn't happen in the NFL very often. When it does, you're like, 'Alright, that was pretty good.' I know that it exploded on the internet [*laughter*]."

On TE Gerald Everett:

"I'm glad. We need guys with that play-style that are tough, that are fearless. That's what Gerald [Everett] is. He's been through a lot of the big games. He's one of those play-style guys that we need. He's a big-time weapon for us, a play-maker. It makes us very tough to defend when you have a tight end who can separate and win 1-on-1 against linebackers or safeties or even corners. He is outstanding after the catch. Our guys love it. What we're not going to do is be an undisciplined team. We'll never cross that line of practice. But it's going to get turned up out here when you care. We want guys that are going to go nose-to-nose because when the season starts, that's exactly how it's going to be. You don't want anyone backing down. Gerald is one of the guys you want to go into those big games with."

On if he addresses handling those types of practice situations with the team:

"For sure. It was at the line. That's what we talked about, you want to go right to the line, and you don't want to go past that. That's the tough part of sports that a lot of people don't understand. We want that competition. We want that edge on our football team. We want the guys that are going to compete. Gerald [Everett] cares about this team. He cares about doing it the right way. When you see two guys going out at like that, that's a good thing. We just don't want any punches being thrown and stuff like that because that's when you get penalties and thrown out of the game. Then, it hijacks everything, so we're not going to let that happen, but we want guys like Gerald Everett."

On LB Daiyan Henley's development:

"You said the right word; developing. That's what he's doing. He's improving. He cares a lot. He has all the traits that you're looking for in an inside linebacker. He's doing an outstanding job on special teams. We're going to count on him in special teams. He just needs to continue to see more. For [OLB] Tuli [Tuipulotu] and a guy like Daiyan, and a guy like Quentin [Johnston], you just have these outstanding mentors in your room. Some guys don't have the benefit of that. Maybe they go to a room where it's just all young players, and they don't have that mentor, that someone that can really show them how to do it. The fact that he's with Eric [Kendricks] and Kenneth [Murray Jr.] every single day is a huge benefit to Daiyan. He has a lot of ability and the toughness, the play-style, that we're looking for. He is going to have some days that he doesn't have his best stuff because he's just young. That's part of being young, some days you just don't have it, but he has all of the things that we're looking for. He's having a good camp for us."

CORNERBACK ASANTE SAMUEL JR.

On breaking up passes at the end of practice:

"I'm just trying to get better and make plays for this team."

On training camp so far:

"I'm feeling good. I feel like our team is getting better each and every day. We're just competing really hard. We're making each other better."

On the defensive chemistry:

"Everybody is running to the ball. Everybody is buying into our culture that we're trying to bring to the team. Everybody just loves being around each other."

On getting work in the slot and outside corner:

"They want me to learn both of the positions because you never know how the season goes. Wherever the coaches want me to play, that's where I'll play. It's a team game. Whatever helps the team, that's what I want to do."

On challenges of playing slot as compared to outside corner:

"I mean, it's kind of the same. It's just different techniques and learning different calls, they're kind of different inside. You have to just adjust to the calls."

On potentially playing slot or outside corner:

"I've just been training for outside and inside. Whatever the coach wants me to play, that's where I'll play. I'm behind all of my guys and I want all of my guys do well. Whatever makes the team better."

On receiving corps:

"Oh, we have a lot of great receivers on our team. Each of them have their own specific traits that they have. Going against them in practice helps you kind of defend every receiver in the NFL because you get to go against whatever you need."

On defensive consistency:

"It's just doing all the little things right. Staying together throughout the season. It's a long season, and just staying healthy."

On the rookie defenders:

"They're doing great. We have a lot of great corners, linebackers, D-Line. We have a lot of great rookies. I'm excited to see them play in preseason and show their talent. I just can't wait to see them ball. They've been working hard every day. I'm just glad that their dreams are coming true."

On cohesion in the secondary:

"We definitely are familiar with each other. It's kind of like a brotherhood. We're setting the culture here. Everybody just wants to see everybody do well. Just come out here, and when you're working with somebody and a lot of people every day, you kind of build chemistry with them along the way. There's going to be ups and downs, but at the end of the day, we all wear Chargers gear. That's what we do it for, the Chargers."

WIDE RECEIVER MIKE WILLIAMS

On how he's feeling:

"I feel good. Everything is solid."

On not participating in a late team period due to rest:

"Yes."

On QB Justin Hebert:

"A lot of explosive plays. What we were looking for, getting down the field with the size and the speed that we have and the guys in our room, the running back room, tight end room. A lot of explosive plays, making his reads quick; going from the first option, second option check downs. Everything is looking good."

On 'pushing the ball down the field':

"I feel like with [former Offensive Coordinator Joe] Lombardi we pushed the ball down the field too, it might be a little bit more now than it was in the past. With his arm strength, he's probably one of the strongest throwers in this league. We want to use it to the best of our advantage, get us down the field. Make big plays, big plays get the offense going, defense going and put points on the board."

On advantages in the slot:

"Lining up in different spots, that's the main thing. Letting me work the middle of the field a little more. Outside also, everyone knows I can go on the outside; just moving around a little bit more and getting different looks."

On comparing his size to defenders as 'a small forward being guarded by a point guard':

"Those guys in the nickel, they're pretty small. I think I'm a little bigger than them, I feel like I've got to use it to my advantage."

On WR John Hightower:

"He knows how to run routes, he's in [WR] Keenan's [Allen] ear all the time, learning new things. I feel like he can be a good receiver in this league."

On if he played in the slot at Clemson:

"I played a little bit."

On the importance of staying healthy:

"I always try to stay healthy every season. Some things you can't control when you go out there and play football. I try to play all the games; whatever game we've got coming up I want to be available for my team. Just stick to what I'm doing and control what I can control."

On WR Joshua Palmer:

"We've all seen it before. He's picking up where he left off and continuing to make plays."

On Palmer:

"I feel like he has the same motivation that he's always had. To be in this league you've got to be motivated; show up every day and put the work in if you want to stay in this league. I feel like he's always been motivated. We all just show up, make our plays, watch film make the corrections and do it all again the next day."

On relationship with Herbert and WR Keenan Allen:

"That comes from communication and doing it. I feel like just getting the experience on the field helps that a lot. I know where he's going to put the ball when I'm running downfield, and he knows where I like it. That just comes from getting the reps in and communicating; from his rookie year to now we've grown a lot and we're still looking to build on that.

On 'comparing jump ball success rates going from 80-20 to 90-10':

"We need to keep it going up."

On Offensive Coordinator Kellen Moore:

"It's been awesome. He's young, knows how to get us the ball and how to move us all around, getting everyone involved. That's the main thing; defense is sometimes keying in on certain players so you've got to adjust, and he does a good job of putting us in certain spots so the defense can't key on us. That's a big thing."

On more explosive plays in the offense:

"I feel like we had a lot of explosive plays the first few practices we've been out here. Defense had a pretty good day today but we're going to show up this weekend and we will compete. That's why we show up; some days they might get us, we'll get them. That just comes with having two good sides of the ball."

On the scheme being spread out:

"It is a little bit more spread out. When you can spread a defense out you can't really get a lot of double teams like that, so we just spread out a little more. More space, more opportunity for catch and run."

On getting the offense consistent:

"Staying healthy, that's the main thing. If all 11 of us are out there every game, then everything else will speak for itself."

On players being chippy:

"It's cool, sometimes you have that. It happens sometimes, everyone is competing; sometimes that's going to happen, move on [*laughter*]."