

Chargers Week 18 Media Availability

Wednesday, January 4, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On his initial reaction to Bills S Damar Hamlin's injury:

"I have a relationship, going back to when I was at John Carroll and James Madison, with Damar's high school team. He went to Pittsburgh Central Catholic. I recruited him when he was 15 years old, and a lot of his teammates. I know his head coach, Terry Totten, really well. This is a great kid, this is a great kid. This guy is one of the best players to ever play at Central. He was an incredible player at Pitt. It was a little bit more personal because you know this guy, you know his teammates. [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo Hill, our defensive coordinator, coached and recruited him at Pitt. His wife, Tanaya [Hill], was his academic advisor. [Wide Receivers Coach] Chris Beatty, my wideout coach, coached him for two years at Pitt. This was a really personal thing for us. The first thing was just the prayers for him and his family, prayers for the Bills and his teammates and his coaches — everybody that is involved within that organization — prayers for the Bengals and their players, because they were sharing the field that night. You just know that, if you're a part of this game, when something like that happens, it impacts so many people. Total respect and admiration for [Bills Head Coach] Sean McDermott and [Bengals Head Coach] Zac Taylor in the way that they handled a truly rare, one-of-a-kind, type of situation. So much respect for both of them. Since that play, you've seen that football brings people together, and the power of prayer. What you've been able to see since is what, I think, makes football special. We send our deepest prayers to Damar and his family, the Bills players and their organization, the Bengals, and everybody that is involved with pro football."

On his conversation with the players surrounding Hamlin's situation:

"I think the big thing is telling them the truth of what happened, what actually happened on the field, from a medical perspective, and that's what we tried to do. We activated Dr. Eugene Yim [MD], one of our team physicians, and he said, 'Hey, this is what actually happened on the field that day,' so that everybody knows the truth of that. Then, also understanding that there were a lot of amazing things on the field that night — the medical personnel, that they were there, they were prepared. I think the NFL and its protocols are a big reason why this guy has a chance to make it. I thought you saw the best of the NFL that night, coming together to save his life. I think you saw the special part of the NFL fraternity of those two teams coming together and the way they handled it, just the grace of both of those teams, and the courage and the strength. I just think that that was something that we wanted to do with our team, is have Dr. Yim talk to our team, and then [Team Clinician] Dr. Herb Martin and George Gregory, our chaplain. You want to involve all of the people around your team to share with your players what's going on and to be there for them. That's what you have to do in a situation like that, you have to be there for your guys because this is going to hit people differently and it's going to hit at different places, maybe, in spaces and time. What we want to do is make sure, every step of the way, that we're there. That's what makes football special."

On how Hill and Beatty have reacted to the situation:

“They’re both hanging tough. When you know someone and you’ve invested in someone, you know how special they are. This kid is living his dream. To be able to see him at such a young age, and now, to be one of their starting players, just a young kid living his dream. I think it hits you. It’s really heavy, but at the same time, you’re hopeful, and you know how special of a person he is and how special of a kid that he is. We’re just praying for him. I think that this is going to bring everybody closer together, for sure.”

On further evaluation of the situation:

“I think the thing about everyone learning about what happened is just truly how rare that case is, just the perfect sequencing. That right amount of trauma, that right sequencing with the heart’s rhythm, we’re learning like everybody else, and I think that is what is important for our players to understand, the truth of what happened. It’s one of those accidents that is a part of life. Like I said, now, our focus is on the prayer and lifting him up, and everybody else up around him. That’s where our focus is going to be.”

On resources available to members of the Chargers organization:

“The NFL did a good job of getting all of the clubs together and having an open forum of what each club was going to do, thoughts for how to proceed. We have a tremendous team in-house, led by Dr. Herb Martin, and with Dr. Yim on the medical side of things. From a mental health standpoint, with [Sr. Director of Player Engagement] Arthur Hightower, what you want to establish with your guys is that when something like this happens, everyone handles it differently; some people want to handle it right away, some people might need some space, some people need to do it 1-on-1, some need it do it in small groups or a big group. You just want to make sure that you offer all of those avenues for your players, and that it’s not just today that you’re talking about it, that you’re available for them throughout. It’s that consistency of your presence and understanding that we’re all in it together. Then, in your own way, living an example to help raise Damar up, because that’s the most important thing, to lift him up and those around him. All of the things that the NFL has done, and is doing, since that game, you can see what people have done for his GoFundMe page for his charity, and what people are doing for the Bills players and the Bengals players, and throughout the entire NFL, I think that’s amazing, what has happened in such a short amount of time.”

On ‘transitioning’ to preparations for Sunday’s game:

“It’s important, that transition. I think that you have to have the right amount of perspective and the right amount of focus in both places. I think that you do that by knowing your players, by knowing your guys. I think that’s why you have to have close football teams and close football organizations, so that you kind of know what that right touch is. When you move forward to this week, for us, which is Denver and this football game, it’s knowing that you have to be able to do both of these things at the same time. You have to be able to deal with what happened and also do your job and live your dream at the same time, and that there’s work to do this week, and that you have to be able to do both of those things. That’s where our focus has been, defining the week — this is going to be our rhythm and routine, this is what we need to get accomplished and how we need to do it. Then, at the same time, once all that’s done, then we also need to address what happened the other night, too. You can do all that at the same time. You lean into the leaders of your football team, whether it’s coach, player, or organizationally. It’s going to take everybody in order to get it done.”

On having a ‘level of comfort’ in the protocols in place by the NFL to properly handle medical situations when they arise:

“That is one of the things that I think everyone is discovering, just how incredible the response was and the poise. I think the level of expertise, the capacity of the people on that field that night and what they were able to do, they are well trained. I think that all of us can take a huge lesson from that. It is one of those once-in-a-lifetime moments. It is a once-in-a-lifetime moment that requires a once-in-a-lifetime response. I think the people in Cincinnati that night showed that they were ready, and that is what the NFL is about. On gameday, Dr. Yim said that there are probably over 30 people [on-hand], and then all of the resources that are on an NFL football field for these guys, to be ready for that moment. I am just really proud of those people and admire them in every way because it’s amazing.”

On 'potential changes in how the team will approach Sunday's game' due to playoff seeding scenarios having the potential of being solidified before kickoff on Sunday:

"We're definitely going to prepare this week to try and go win this football game with the guys that we have on our team, the 48 guys that are going to be up. A similar situation happened for me in Chicago in 2018. We were already in the playoffs, but there was the potential for us to have a first-round bye. The Rams needed to lose and we were going to know the result of that game as it was happening, and the Rams were off to a big lead and we knew that we weren't going to be the two-seed, we weren't going to have that bye. I have a little bit of experience with that, but I think it just goes back to what I said all along about the approach. You have to take the facts on the ground, as they happen in real time, to make your determinations. That's what we're going to do. Once we find out about that game, we'll make the appropriate decisions moving forward, just take it case-by-case. Obviously, we're not going to know that until Sunday. Our approach this week is to go beat the Broncos and to play our best."

On 'if regular backups will receive more snaps in practice this week':

"No. Same preparation."

On an update regarding S Derwin James Jr.:

"Good. He will be at practice tomorrow."

On entering the final week of the regular season:

"I think your engine has to get, whatever you want to call it, that extra energy because you are headed towards something. For us, we have been able to play well down the stretch. That is still the goal, to continue to improve as a football team, to make this team as good as it can be heading into the playoffs. This is a big game for us. This is a quality football team, as they have demonstrated throughout the season. They have been in a lot of close games. They have a lot of quality players. They have a lot of players that are going to really challenge us this week. We have a lot of things that we need to improve on heading into the playoffs. It's going to be a big week for us, for sure."

On QB Justin Herbert's injury status:

"Like I said after the game, just bumps and bruises from the game. He will be full [participation] at practice tomorrow."