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## Chargers Week 13 Media Availability

Friday, December 3, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On DL Linval Joseph:**

“He’s not going to be back to this game. He’s not quite there yet. We’re just working him back and making sure that when he does return, that he’s ready to go and give his best. That’s where he is right now.”

#### **On why Joseph ‘is not ready yet’:**

“Just the game shape, being out two games. When it comes to these issues, we’re going to make sure that when these guys come back, that they have their full wind — especially someone that is built like he is, making sure that he has his full game shape back and all that. We’re learning a lot as we go. I’m just going to make sure that he is safe and sound.”

#### **On if Joseph is still in the COVID-19 protocol:**

“He is.”

#### **On if the defensive line rotation will feature DL Christian Covington, Justin Jones and Jerry Tillery:**

“Yes. Those guys will be in there with [DL] Breiden [Fehoko] and [DL] Joe [Gaziano].”

#### **On the potential of rearranging the distributing of snaps along the defensive line rotation:**

“We’re always going to use a rotation with our interior D-line. In the way that that game went, we got some good breaks in the game. We want our best guys out there. Jerry [Tillery] is certainly one of our starters. I felt like he played well in the game. I like the way that he’s playing. We’re always going to rotate those those D-linemen that are in the game. Cov [Christian Covington] and Jerry [Tillery], those guys are our best players, so we’re going to put those guys out there. We expect them to go do the job for us.”

#### **On if there is a ‘consideration’ to playing CB Asante Samuel Jr. on Reserve/Injured:**

“He’s just day-to-day. He’s not an IR candidate. We’re monitoring him closely. We’re hoping to get him back sometime before an IR situation.”

#### **On G Matt Feiler returning to the lineup:**

“He’s one of our best players. It’ll mean a great deal. You saw last week what he means to us. I think, sometimes, you see the value of people when they’re not there, and I think that he certainly fits that description. He’s had a good week of practice and shown real toughness. He gives us a really good chance to be our best offense.”

**On continuing to develop G/T Brenden Jaimes:**

"I think that timeline for every player is a little bit different. Like I said, we do feel like, after the bye, that he's definitely grown quite a bit. We feel definitely more confident in his availability and readiness to not just go out there to be able to excel, and not that he's going to be perfect, not that he's going to not have his share plays that show that you're a rookie — we just want to make sure that when he goes out there, we're comfortable with the decision. I think that we're really close to that with him. That game last week was more of a reflection of who was on the other side of the football. At that point in time, that was the decision that we felt was best. Brendan's been doing well. We have confidence in him. I think you've seen, with all the rookies that we've played, we're definitely not an apprehensive group, in terms of putting young players out there. We just want to make sure that we put them out there with the best chance to be successful. I think that we're definitely getting closer to that with him. I know that he's ready. In his mind, he has that readiness from a mindset standpoint. I'm hoping that he gets the show he can do."

**On his relative timeline for the development of an individual offensive lineman:**

"Any time you're at the point of attack, that transition from the NFL to college, you cannot minimize the transition. It's such a physical transition. As much as it's mental, it's a physical transition. A lot of these guys, when we talked about developmental O-lineman or D-lineman, there's a strength component to the game, where one full year of development will do a lot for them as a pro player, especially for a guy like Brenden [Jaimes], who was a college tackle and is now playing NFL guard. That's a different position. It requires a different type of body type for him. Just a different level of strength and skill. I think that's why it's incumbent upon you to hire really good coaches at those positions, because they're developmental, and that you have a sports performance staff that can help those guys really improve their game. Then, you have to be patient with them and you have to know that they're going to be a lot better Year 2 and 3 than they are in Year 1. You have to have that long-term projection available for your program. Fortunately here, we have full alignment with [General Manager] Tom [Telesco], [Director of Player Personnel] JoJo [Wooden], [President of Football Operations] John [Spanos], [Owner and Chairman of the Board] Dean [Spanos] and everybody, where with some of these guys, they're going to be so much better as they go. Just because they're not ready at the beginning of the season doesn't mean that they're not going to be ready at the end of the season. That's what we're trying to do with a guy like Brenden [Jaimes]. I think that he's been doing a good job. I'm hoping he gets them out to show that he can do."

**On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.:**

"Definitely expect him to play. How much? I think that will be determined on the flow of the game and the personnel grouping that they're in, and then how he's playing. All three of those guys are going to play in the game and we're expecting them to play well for us."

**On how much CB Davontae Harris will play on Sunday:**

"He's going to have a role in the game. I think it'll be a bigger factor on special teams, and then kind of a backup, emergency role at corner. He's had a good week of practice. He's in good shape. He definitely has familiarity with how we play. [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo [Hill] and I both coached him, so there's that relationship there to where we have a little bit more trust in him because we've been out there in the fire with him. He's had a nice week of practice and he will be active for the game. We'll see where it goes."

**On if G Senio Kelemete will revert to being the offense's extra lineman with Feiler returning to the lineup:**

"We're working through that. This week, it's been a good week of practice to get some evaluations, some further evaluations, because a lot of it depends on the tackle — if something were to happen to him, who would we move out? We're sorting through that and we'll let you guys know before the game."

**On if RB Darius Bradwell is 'ahead of' RB Larry Rountree III in the running back rotation:**

"It's another one of those that you'll find out at the game. It's been a good week of practice for those guys, those four guys behind [RB] Austin [Ekeler]. Those same components that we've been talking about are a big part of the evaluation. We're going to stay at it. I'm hopeful that somebody emerges from that group."

**On if it is 'strange' that 'nobody has emerged as the second running back':**

"I don't think that it is strange. Sometimes, you have positions like that. You just wish, sometimes, that it would happen, but it just hasn't happened. We can't force it to happen because we're giving people opportunities. That's all you can do. If it hasn't happened yet, then it hasn't happened yet. We're going to try the best we can to put good plans together, to put those guys in the best positions to be successful, and make sure that that group kind of complements Austin [Ekeler] with a true committee approach until someone takes this and goes with it. It's just a position, right now, that it hasn't worked out that way. Sometimes, that happens on your team."

**On RB Joshua Kelley:**

"I see an explosive element. I think that he's done a nice job recently. It's moments like that that we're trying to find that consistency of those explosive moments. [RB] Justin Jackson had some explosive moments against New England. Then, he went out. [RB] Larry [Rountree III] has had explosive moments. They all have. Who can do it consistently? Who can we trust in pass protection? Who can we trust on special teams? That hasn't happened, in terms of the consistency of reliability and availability. We're just going to keep working that position. That's just the way it is right now. All those guys are good dudes. We're going to stick with them. We still have a lot of ball left to play."

**On if he 'enjoys the underdog role' in advance of Sunday's game:**

"I certainly don't feel that way. I don't want that mindset on our football team. I don't believe that. I want our mindset to be on the Chargers, not on any external feeling. That's where our focus has been this week; it's on our football team. We have full respect for their team, but the focus is on our team and making the improvements that we need to make. I think that we've had a good week of practice. Now, we get to prove ourselves against a really good team."

**On returning to Ohio to play the Bengals:**

"My brothers are going to be at the game. I have some teammates at Dayton that are high school coaches down that way in Cincinnati, I think that they will be at the game. That's always a special thing, when you can have family or friends involved. We're so far away over here, it'll be good to see some familiar faces, whether it's at the hotel or at the stadium. A lot of my good friends that I played with are high school coaches down there, really successful high school coaches. They're kind of in the thick of the playoffs there in the state of Ohio, or their season is just finishing. It'll be good to see some teammates, for sure, and have that family feeling. It's always good to see familiar faces."

**On why C Corey Linsley 'stands with his back to the huddle':**

"He is looking at the defense. It is by design. He can hear what Justin [Herbert] is saying, but what is more important to his is what grouping is coming out. Who is over there? Is [Browns DE] Myles Garrett in the game, or is he out of the game? Is [Chiefs DT] Chris Jones in the game, or is he out of the game? Are they in nickel? Are they in penny? Are they in base? That's what he is looking for. That's why he is a general. That's why he is so special. I'm so glad that we have him."

**On Linsley's impact on the team:**

"He's a really good example of when you become a head coach, you say, 'OK, this is what I want my team to look like. This is what we want the Chargers to look like.' He has all of that. He has toughness, discipline. He has all of the smarts. He has all of that experience. It's at the game. It's at the facility, in the meeting rooms. He's consistent. The consistency and performance for this guy is the highest that you could ever hope for at that position. When you pay guys the way that we paid him, you want those guys to really be the example of why you are paying them that much. In the NFL, that's a big reality. He represents a guy that is worth it in more ways than one. It's been awesome to join up with him. We had played against him so many times, and I have known about him, really, like all the way back to when he was in high school, and he has exceeded every expectation that could ever have been there for him, both internally and externally. He's a big factor in our success. I'm so thankful for him joining up with us — him and his wife, Anna. He comes from a great family. So thrilled that he is a Charger."

## **SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR DERIUS SWINTON II**

### **On K Dustin Hopkins' missed kick:**

“Yeah, he hit the ground. He chunked — just like a wedge. He got underneath of it. When you see it on the replay, dirt came up. A good chunk about that big came as his toe hit it. That’s why the ball fluttered off. That’s why he looked down because he felt something different. Anybody who golfs, when you swing, you say, ‘What happened?’ when you get underneath. You see it fly and that’s why he looked back at the ground. Everything else in the operation was good, it was he chunked it. It chunked because he got under it. It’s an unfortunate situation, but that happens sometimes.

“It’s one of those things that just happens in the course of the game. Their turf, they re-sodded in the middle. That happens. You’re looking at the turf and how it comes up in different ways. Sometimes your foot just gets in there. Going into a longer distance [kick], you get underneath it a little bit and get a little bit of that dirt. If he doesn’t get that, I think it’s good. It still had a chance, but it happened. I don’t want to blame it on the turf, the playing surface or anything like that.”

### **On if the team practices with wet balls in case of weather on Sunday:**

“We prepare for the elements. I learned that from being with [Hall of Fame QB] Peyton Manning in Denver. Anytime you look at the forecast on Monday, then you look at it again on Wednesday. This week, you looked at it again on Thursday — it went from a 37 percent chance to now a 97 percent chance of precipitation. That’s going to be fun, yeah. It’s something that we look at and prepare for. You have to be ready for it. Obviously, out here, we get the best weather there is, so you just try to, in any way, simulate what’s really going to happen. Some people dunk balls, some people use water bottles. We try to prepare for those things in different ways for the people that are handling the ball. Obviously, with the punter, long snapper and kicker — who has to kick it — we prepare for those things. Once we saw the forecast turn that way, we really ramped it up in how we’re getting ready for it. Luckily, they get to play in it, too.”

### **On Paul Brown Stadium’s playing surface being field turf:**

“I think at this time of year those are the things that you prepare for. With the weather, turf helps with the footing a little bit. It’s just one of those things — luckily, they have to play in it, too. Someone said, ‘Well, they practice in it.’ Um, well, it’s football. We all are ready to play it on Sunday.”

### **On playing in stadiums that have to re-turf the field late in the season:**

“I think it’s one of those things where you alert players to it. When I was in Arizona last year, we knew that going into December — and then we shared the field with San Francisco — that it was torn up. You looked at the players and said, ‘Hey, pre-game, test it out.’ You have different lengths of your cleats. Specialists have different plant cleats that they use. I think the awareness of that pre-game going into the game. Then, in Arizona, we knew once the Fiesta Bowl was played, we had perfect turf after. It’s just one of those things where you look at, ‘Okay, where are we going?’ Then, you also look at when have they re-sodded? What games are being played? When I was in Denver, they played the all the [high school] state championship games there, so you knew at a certain point of the year that it was going to be torn up. They have different cleats for that and the equipment staff does a great job. You just alert the players. I mean, it’s a good problem to have as you get into January. If you play deeper into the playoffs, you start showing them film of what does it look like in January? What does the wind do? What does the snow do? I know, when we were in Denver, we had [former Broncos WR/KR] Trindon Holliday, who went to LSU and had never seen the snow before he got there. We put together a whole reel of ball handling in the snow for returners and what it does. Everybody thinks it affects the return team, but it’s really the coverage team that has to change directions. You know where you’re going, your footing is better. Those are the things you, kind of this time of year, if you’re going somewhere like that, that re-sods, has weather or heavy rain, wind — I think those are things that you address with the team in a manner just to prepare them mentally because they’ll be fine. Most of them, I’d say, have played in some type of weather. It’s just to alert them when things like that come up.”



**On the special teams development of RBs Darius Bradwell, Joshua Kelley and Larry Rountree III:**

"I think they're all progressing. I think you're looking at three guys there where — Bradwell, last year played some special teams. I think he's progressing. You saw him last week. He got some opportunities. He did a good job of what he was asked to do. You look at Josh Kelley, he's a guy that has been a ball-carrier his entire life. Like, I say, he's a guy that has carried the ball from the womb to now. Special teams has been different for him and he's come along. He plays really fast. He's a fast guy in space. Then, Rountree uses his aggressiveness, his speed and his size. He also only played kick returner at Missouri. It's just taking guys that have been primarily ball carriers their entire career and they're really progressing, learning our techniques. You've seen them have some good moments on the field — all three of them. I just think that it's a good room and they have someone to look at — [RB] Justin Jackson. He went out last week and he showed them, 'Hey, this is how you really play in coverage and the return game.' Having him in the room, I think they're really looking to him. They can have those conversations asking, 'How do I get better?' How do they get better using their skillset because they're not all the same body-type. I think they're progressing and we're getting better in that room."

**On CB Davontae Harris:**

"Which Wich? I say that because he introduced himself as Which Wich and I said, 'What?' He goes, 'I'm from Wichita, Kansas.' I go, 'I got you.' It's a college name, I get it and he's really fast. I told him, 'As fast as you are, I'll call you whatever you want.'

"He gives you length, he gives you speed and tackling ability. I mean, he is a dynamic guy. When you watch him, even when he played for the Broncos [two years ago] against the Chargers, I think he had two tackles at gunner. He's a really dynamic player in coverage. He gives you another speed guy at corner. It's just the length that he can be versatile in different areas. He's going to help us in that way. You can never have enough fast guys. I always believe that — you can never have enough fast guys that can change direction that can play in space. He really brings another element of that. With T.C. [CB Tevaughn Campbell] starting and playing more defensive reps, I think that helps us with depth. I think that really does help with depth because you don't just want to pull, pull, pull — if a guy is playing more defense, you don't want to pull him that way, so that will help us there."

**On RB Austin Ekeler at gunner:**

"He always says, 'I'm available.' I say, 'Well, you keep scoring touchdowns and you will not be available for me.' He always says, 'I can go out there.' I go, 'I know you can, but we need you in other places.' The players know because Austin will let them know. He does a good job of saying, 'Hey, if you ever need me to talk to a guy and just use this old film.' It helps, especially in the offseason I use it a lot with the rookies, just saying, 'Hey, this is a guy who changed the whole trajectory of his career because he showed up in a preseason game — the last preseason game, showed up and made you say, 'Who is this guy?' He makes the team and all of the sudden, a few years later, here you go. I tell him that he went from a single number, which back then was not good. He had a single number at a skill position. It's like, 'Ah, he's on the way out,' but then, he ends up being a guy in this league. We have seen it, in the offseason moreso just showing the young guys how you can progress in this league and change your whole trajectory — not only of your career, but your livelihood, too."

**On building a special teams unit from the ground up:**

"I think it's right where it should be based on who we've played and what we have. Like you said, we have basically our core is mainly young guys. When I say young, it's less than three years, really, of playing NFL football. When you look at it, going against the Cleavelands, Baltimores, New Englands, Pittsburghs that have core guys — I think we have taken our hits on the chin. That's just part of it. I tell them all the time, 'They've played more football than you. They have grown-man NFL strength technique-wise, not as far as weight room and they know how to play the game.' I think you've seen it progress where we have games where, okay, we're there. We're having a good rep here or there. Then, there's games where we're taking our lumps. Last week, I told the guys, 'Listen, we did our part. We held the rope.' I said, 'There are going to be some games where you have to hold the rope and you have to make it a back-and-forth, tug-and-pull,' and we did that. I said, 'Now, we have to go against teams and now you have to figure out how do we make a play? Don't force it to happen, just do your job.' I think that's what they're learning. They're learning that I don't have to do anything spectacular. I just have to do my job, be penalty-free, everything [Head Coach] Brandon [Staley] talks about — field position, flipping the field, specialists be good at what you do, returners manage the game and then we're holding up and we're blocking — let's be sound in those things. I think that, at the beginning

of anything, I think that's what you want to see. Are we taking the techniques and the scheme and taking it out on the field? We've progressively done that with those young guys. I think that's the thing that I'm most proud of, is that we're still progressing. They're seeing things and the same mistakes aren't being made twice. I think it's moreso, 'Hey, we did this. Okay, we hit our head. Okay, it's something else.' Then, the more we play football with these young guys, the better we'll get. I think that's the thing when you look at — you probably go back and look at [Ravens Head Coach John] Harbaugh's first years in Baltimore, I'm sure there was some attrition there because you just learning a whole new language and young guys have never done it. I'm proud of them for being able to week-in and week-out say, 'Alright, let's put that one away, I have to learn from it and now I have to progress.' I think we're in a good spot. We're not exactly where we want to be, obviously, and that's part of it. I think we're progressing. I think every week we see it. We're progressing. We're progressing. Every week, I tell them, 'If we can master the simple things, now we can get onto playoff football.' That's what playoff football is. I told them on Monday, I said, 'Listen, that game you had last week special teams-wise, that's what playoff football is. Give-and-take, field position. They punt one out of bounds, we fair catch one, we tackle them for a four- or five-yard gain.' It's not going to be a 37 to 34 game. I said, 'Playoffs, if you get there, this is what it is.' I think they're learning that. It's good to be in those games early and I think that's where we're progressing."

## **QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**

### **On the Bengals' defense:**

"They're really good. We've seen a lot of the film. They're able to do a lot of things on defense. They're really well-coached. They have some really athletic guys in the secondary that are able to make plays all over the field. They have a really good front seven. It's going to take a lot from us."

### **On if he has spoken with Bengals QB Joe Burrow since the 2020 NFL Scouting Combine:**

"We haven't spoken since then, but Joe was a great guy to meet. I'm always rooting for him. The success that he's had over the past couple of years has been awesome. I'm always cheering for the best for him."

### **On 'playing against' Burrow:**

"I think every opportunity that you get to play against a great quarterback like that is special. But, it's about us and their defense. We have to go out and move the ball. We have to convert on third down. We have to do all these things so that we are able to put up points on Sunday."

### **On Burrow 'benefitting' from WR Ja'Marr Chase, one of his college teammates, with him on the Bengals:**

"I think timing is huge. When you get to know a receiver, when he breaks out routes and what he is going to do in specific situations, I think that's super helpful. Unfortunately, it's probably a new system that they have to learn and a whole bunch of new terminology and language that they have to learn, but they have a big step up on everyone."

### **On the benefit of being on the sidelines for last year's win over the Bengals:**

"I think any time that you're able to watch on the sideline, there are things that you can learn and pick up. I would have loved to have watched more games and learned more, but that was the situation that it was. I got to pick up as much as I could from [former Chargers QB] Tyrod [Taylor] and those guys in the quarterback room. It was a lot of learning, for sure."

### **On if he 'learns more' through 'trial by fire':**

"I think there are good and bad things to both sides. I think that if you learn by watching, you're able to pick up on a lot of things, but at the same time, going through and living through those experiences, whether it's good or bad, you have to learn from them. I think that you're able to learn from both sides."

### **On looking back to last season to help 'appreciate' being in the playoff hunt in December:**

"That is a really good point of looking back and realizing where you were. All of those losses last year, they make you appreciate the ones this year and the close games that we did put away this year. It's a tough league. Wins do not come easy. Every win is a grind. You ask any of the guys in that locker room, the week is the toughest part of the week, just going through and studying film, going through the weights and all those practices. We're just happy to be here and, hopefully, playing our best. There's a lot to look forward to."

### **On dropped passes:**

"I don't think that we've struggled with drops. I think the receivers have done an incredible job of getting open and I've done my best to get them the ball. Yeah, we could be better — I could put the ball there better — but I think that they're battling for every ball and they're coming up with some really tight, contested catches, which is huge from those guys."

### **On his knowledge gained over the last two seasons:**

"I think the more you learn, the more you realize that you don't know as much as you think you do. I think this past year, you kind of find out that there's so much more that goes into football than what I expected; defenses, the way the linebackers line up, where the safeties rotate and how they disguise things. Those are things that we didn't really get the time to spend on last year, it was more of learning the offense and just getting ready to play football. The more you kind of dive into it, the more there is. That's one of the things that we've looked at this year, just kind of diving into it and having fun — especially with [Passing Game Coordinator/QBs Coach] Shane Day and [Offensive Coordinator] Joe Lombardi, having those guys there, they've exceeded it all. I've been able to learn a bunch from them."

**On QB Chase Daniel:**

“Chase is awesome. He has had so much experience and he’s been able to see so many different offenses, so many different defenses. He’s a great kind of buffer between the coaches and me. If there’s ever a problem or anything, if I’m murky on a read or anything like that, I go to Chase and Chase is like, ‘This is how I think about it. This is how I see it.’ We all come together and we talk about it. Chase is one of those guys that has just been around for so long and he knows the game so well. He’s had a lot of success over the years.”

**On developing in the run game:**

“We love to move the ball as well as we can offensively, whether that’s through the air or on the ground. I think the guys up front have done an incredible job of blocking all year. They’ve given me plenty of time to throw the ball. Any time that you get a guy like [Austin] Ekeler or Justin Jackson, Joshua Kelley, all of those guys in the backfield, they’re going to fight for every yard that they can get.”

**On supporting Los Angeles’ 74th Street Elementary for this year’s My Cause, My Cleats initiative:**

“It was actually a school that we found close to SoFi Stadium up in Los Angeles. I got to spend a day with them. We donated some equipment for them to go back to school safely. Just got to spend the day with them playing catch, playing tag out at recess. Just got to spend time with them, having lunch. I think it was a great opportunity for us to go back to them and continue to help them out because I remember when I was that age and having that type of role model or influence in my life helped me a ton.”

**On if it ‘frustrating’ when play-action shot plays do not materialize:**

“I think that’s the NFL, unfortunately. You would love to be able to push the ball downfield as much as you can, especially when you have the weapons like [WR] Mike Williams and [WR] Keenan [Allen], those guys that are able to get past defenders. The defense looks at film, too. They get deep and you have to check it down. Sometimes, you have to scramble. You’re blocking some really athletic guys on defense. I think that there’s so much that goes into it. We would love to be able to push the ball and throw the ball as far as we can, but that’s just not going to happen every time.”

**On G Matt Feiler returning to the lineup:**

“He’s been one of those guys that we’ve relied on all year. He’s done an incredible job filling in. I know that he’s hurting, but he’s a tough guy. If he could have been out there last week, I know that he would have been in. He’s been incredible all year long. It would mean a lot for us to have him back.”