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Chargers Week 12 Media Availability

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OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR JOE LOMBARDI

On his message to players on the practice squad:

“I think that there’s a long list of guys in the NFL that have been very productive that spent time on the practice squad. I think that you always emphasize that since they’re on a team, they have an opportunity to keep working and keep getting better. If you do that, usually good things happen. How you get here is not really important, it’s what you do once you’re here. Keep getting better every day.”

On the offense’s start to last week’s game:

“We were in a good rhythm. The guys were executing well. We made a number of plays that helped keep those drives alive and kept us going. It’s such a fine line between that kind of a start and one where you’re not scoring points and you’re punting more. A dropped ball here, or a guy who doesn’t make a spectacular catch, and you’re punting. It’s a fine line. You just have to give credit to the players that they went out there and executed and made plays. [QB] Justin [Herbert] threw to the right guy and threw accurately, and scrambled when the opportunity presented itself. The guys up front blocked. We ran the ball well. All of those things add into getting into a rhythm and being able to have that kind of start.”

On if Sunday was ‘a perfect mix’ of throws short, intermediate and long:

“We won the game, so we could say that it’s a perfect mix. I think that every game presents itself differently. The game script develops in a different way. We always want to be able to be balanced. You would rather have 10 10-yard completions than one 100-yard completion and nine incompletions. The yards per attempt is the same. I think that his completion percentage was well over 70 percent. When you do that, good things happen. We’re always trying to strike balance. Sometimes, you lean a little more heavily pass, sometimes run. How the game develops, that certainly is a part of it. Obviously, whatever we were doing Sunday night was successful, certainly in the first few quarters, anyway.”

On efficiency in the short passing game:

“That helps. Almost every play has different levels of receivers. Sometimes you call a play and you’re hoping that you get a deep shot. [Herbert] is scrambling and he kicks one out to [WR] Josh Palmer, which I think was taken down as a run because he kind of flipped it, but you’re trying to call a play to get the ball downfield and doesn’t always work that way. He does such a good job of taking the shot when it’s there, but still making a positive play when it’s not. The touchdown play, [WR] Keenan [Allen] was primary on a little short option route and they overplayed it. He played the play. He saw the go [route] on the outside and saw that the safety wasn’t wide enough and hit it. That was a very unaggressive call that turned into a big play. Part of it is taking what the defense is giving you, and that’s a good thing when you’re accurate and you have guys that are catching the ball and then running after running after the catch.

On last week’s game getting close at the end:

“I would have preferred that we would have just ran away with it and had our feet up in the press box late because you’re up by a few scores, but I think that it speaks to the character of the guys and the team. That momentum, that ball was rolling hard the other way. No one panicked. They just went out there and kept playing and believed in our ability to win that game. It’s very satisfying.”

On the play call intention on WR Mike Williams' touchdown:

"We had seen that they were playing aggressively towards the route that Keenan [Allen] was running, so you knew that there was a chance. When they were lining up, it hit my brain, like, 'Man, that throw is going to be there.' You're hoping the quarterback sees it, and he sure did. He saw it fast and the ball got there fast. It's not often that it happens. I think that we hit that shot against Washington in the first game, same play — [Herbert] hit Mike [Williams] down the sideline. It happens. You might call a play like that two or three times a game and it might happen two or three times a year that you hit that outside throw."

On Williams starting the game with three receptions on the offense's opening drive:

"I think that it's good. Two of those were two big third-down conversions. We are certainly making an effort to get him the ball. The last two games, anyway, there have been some number of calls where he's primary and the defense just took him away, and we had to progress through. Every play comes out differently. Justin [Herbert] does a good job of finding the right guy, based on how the defense is playing. He started out hot because that's what the defense told him to do, and then he wasn't making a bunch of catches there in the middle part, and then he made a couple of big catches at the end. I think that another big game is in his future, sooner rather than later. I just can't tell exactly when that will be."

On if QB Justin Herbert's scrambles benefitted play call selection as the game progressed:

"For sure. A lot of those were explosive runs, so it changes the field position significantly. It keeps drives alive. They were playing man with two high safeties. Well, that just leaves four guys rushing. He was finding the rushing lanes. He gets going and everyone has their back to him, and those turned into big plays. We always say that in those coverages, the quarterback's legs are a part of this play. The O-line was doing a good job. A lot of times, you have that, but everything's compressing, there's nowhere to go. Well, they were blocking well, which gave him scramble lanes to get out of there and make big plays. Credit to everyone, but just him recognizing it and taking off and getting those yards and, for the most part, avoiding hits, which is huge — getting down and when the journey is over. It's huge. When you force a defense to play all of those elements — they have to cover Mike [Williams], [TE] Jared [Cook], Keenan [Allen], [RB] Austin [Ekeler], [WR] Jalen [Guyton] and all of our guys that are going out for passes. Then, they have to say, 'If we ignore the quarterback, he could go off on a 20-yard run.' That adds an element that makes it tough to defend."

On Herbert 'protecting himself' when scrambling:

"[Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day emphasizes that as much, probably, as any coach in the NFL, to avoid those hits. He's a competitive sucker, especially in the second half — sometimes the competitiveness gets the better part of him. Yeah, we certainly emphasize that he doesn't need to be taking hits."

On the Broncos' secondary:

"Talent. A good scheme, and a scheme that they play very well. They do a great job of disguising. Everything starts out kind of looking the same, and we have some experience it that because there's a lot of carryover with our defense. We saw a lot of that in training camp. Good players and a good scheme. They execute it well. It's a challenge when you have four guys in the back end — five, really, when they're in sub [-packages] — that are really high-caliber players."

On Ekeler's 'growth' within the offense:

"I came in with a really high opinion, especially after watching the fan. You have a level of expectation, you're like, 'Man, I think I'm seeing this,' but you never know for sure. He's met the highest level of those expectations. He's so efficient. He's not a big guy, but he runs big. He runs strong. He has good vision. He's a good receiver out of the backfield that catches the ball, and then, when he has it, good things happen. He's a hard guy to tackle. There are not a lot of guys like him that can run in-between the tackles as effectively as he can, but also can be out on the perimeter as a receiver running routes, and be such a dangerous guy in space. We always talk about a thunder back and a lightning back. When we were in New Orleans, that big back, he's the pounder, and then the lightning back is more of the receiver and scat-back. He's just a tremendous combination of both those qualities."

On comparing Ekeler to Saints RB Alvin Kamara:

“It’s tough to compare. There are, obviously, differences, but the way that you employ them in an offense is very similar. He’s smaller, but he doesn’t feel smaller when he plays. He is such a strong kid. You guys have probably seen all of his weight room videos. He’s small, but he’s compact. He runs behind his pads. He’s not an easy guy to tackle. He plays like a big guy.”

On if Herbert’s ability to scramble ‘factors into fourth-down play-calling’:

“It gives you confidence. If we’re in those fourth-and-four types of situations, where you’re more in a likely pass situation, that if something doesn’t pop open right away, he is going to have the ability to extend the play and either get the ball downfield or scramble and get the first down. When you have that kind of multi-talented weapon, there are a lot of ways that you can win, versus a guy that’s just in the pocket and isn’t going to do much when he gets pressured. You have more options to be successful.”

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR RENALDO HILL

On the improvement in run defense:

“It felt pretty good having a lot of young guys step up. Obviously, [Defensive Line Coach] Giff [Smith] and [Run Game Coordinator/Outside Linebackers Coach] Jay [Rodgers] do a good job of continuing to work with those young guys. We know that this is the NFL and that things happen, but those guys were ready to roll. It was good to see that. I think that it shows the growth of this team and that we can continue moving forward and developing guys, keep shaping this team the way we want it.”

On developing depth along the defensive front:

“It is definitely encouraging. Giff [Smith] and Jay Rodgers, you have to give them a ton of credit, not waiting for the moment for someone to go down, but always preparing those guys for any time to step up. That’s what those guys did. That’s what we expected. It definitely shows that we continue to grow this thing. Like I mentioned before, it’s making every room competitive.”

On improving the third-down conversion rate:

“The biggest thing is that we have the guys competing. They’re in position. I saw a couple of tight spots where [CB] Chris [Harris Jr.] was right there. We had the right call on, the things that we wanted to do on that play. Those guys just made a play. There are going to be some moments of that. Then, there has to be some moments where we just have to have full execution. We talk about those things, correct them and hope that it doesn’t show its face again. But, the biggest thing is that we have guys that are competing every day, wanting to get better and wanting to get off of the field on third down. We understand that we have a good quarterback on the other side. It has to be more urgent, and that comes from me. I have to put it in those guys’ ears that we have to get off the field. Good things happen when we get off of the field. That has to be the approach: Get the ball back to Herbie.”

On Broncos QB Teddy Bridgewater:

“He’s a real efficient guy. He has experience. He doesn’t turn the ball over a lot. He knows where to go with the ball. If the checkdown is there, he is going to take it, get it into his skill guys’ hands. We have to do a good job with our disguise plan and try to get different looks. He’s going to take care of the ball. When those shots open up, if he has it, he’s going to throw it up to those the big receivers he has on the outside line, so we have to make sure that we mix it up and not give him the easy looks. I think that is going to be important for us this week.”

On what makes the Broncos offense difficult to defend:

“The biggest thing, just being with those guys over there, is the size factor. Even when you think that you have them covered and matched, that size can take over. We have to do a good job of playing through those big guys this week. Then, you have a shifty guy with [WR Jerry] Jeudy inside, who can create separation. I think that we just have to identify where those guys line up and make sure that we do have eyes on them — sometimes two eyes on them, especially Jeudy. When he’s in the slot, we have to be able to identify him, but we also have to be able to take care of those guys on the outside lane with the size.”

On facing his former team and what he learned from Broncos Head Coach Vic Fangio:

“The biggest thing about being with Vic, I’m thankful for the opportunities that he has given me. It was a chance for me to sit back, watch and kind of be silent and in the background. Try to ask enough questions when I can and when it presents itself, but I just wanted to see what he has done over the years because he has been successful in this league for a long period of time. I just wanted to take it all in. Obviously, I used the resource of [Broncos Defensive Coordinator] Ed Donatell. Being in the same room with him all of the time, I got to see what Vic was thinking on these types of situations. That helped me grow as a coach. It put me into a position that if I were in a signal-caller position, that I would be doing some of those things that Vic instilled in me.”

On if his interview with Fangio was similar to Head Coach Brandon Staley's experience:

"None of that. We sat there and watched some of the film from where I was previously at, coming from Miami. He took me through some of his stuff. No emotions. Get on the board and talk about all of the things that you guys do. We just watched football. I had no clue. I kind of returned back to Miami and Ed Donatell called me and said, 'Hey, are you ready?' It was kind of one of those moments. I never got anything from Vic, whether I had gotten the job or not. But, you know that it comes from a good place. He recognizes early if he has someone good around him. That was the great part about it, he always surrounded himself with good, smart people. I enjoyed every minute of it. Once I got in there with Staley and those guys, I knew he had a really good staff.

On how different his interview was with Staley than it was with Fangio:

"It was obviously lighter. But, at the same time, Staley wanted to take me through the paces to make sure that I was the guy. He said that he wanted to do it the right way. He didn't want to just go off of the fact that we had spent time together. He wanted to make sure that he had the right guy in place. Him being in his first head coaching position, he wanted to make sure that he selected the right person for the position. I knew that the dynamic would be a little similar to how it was in Denver, but I wanted to approach it and show him that I was the guy, as well. He definitely took me through the paces, but it was, probably, just a little bit lighter. We talked a little about situations and our past experiences."

On preparing to face an opposing staff 'that he knows so well':

"It's just trying to not to overthink it. He is going to know what we do, we just have to go out and execute our gameplan. We know him, as well. I think it's just our guys having to line up and play football. Know all of the tells and things that we want to know, stat lines about who is getting the ball, where they're getting the ball, where they're taking their shots and just try to go out and execute the gameplan. I think that is the biggest thing. I'm sure that they're going to try to do the same thing, but we have to focus on the Chargers."

On attributing the improvement in run defense to the players:

"I definitely do. That bye week was big for us. Obviously, the season gets rolling and injuries happen. You have guys in and out of the lineups. Sometimes you revert back to things that you did in the past, but I think that it gave us a point where we were sitting in a bad spot -- no one wanted to be sitting at [rank] 32. We wanted to continue working from this point to get better. I think that the biggest part of it was that everybody was buying into getting this fixed. We didn't want to brush over the week, even though we were sitting in a good spot, as far as the record went. We knew that we had a lot of work to do. I think that everybody did a good job of attacking it and understanding that we had issues that needed to be fixed. It was just getting everybody on the same page. It was definitely beneficial. We're still growing from it. We're still moving forward."

RUNNING BACK AUSTIN EKELER

On if he ‘feels himself getting better every game’ and ‘how much success he feels the offense can deliver this season’:

“Ooh, great question. Do I feel myself getting better every game? I think, it’s more-so finding a rhythm in the offense. It’s not necessarily that I’m, like, working on something during the week that’s changing my game. I feel like I’m the same player, but maybe just being utilized, especially this past game, in a way where the defense was showing a favorable look for my type of matchup. That’s how it goes week-to-week — where are your favorable matchups? You try to make every matchup favorable by just playing at a high level. These guys, the guys on defense, get paid as well. I definitely think we have a rhythm. It comes in-and-out. We’re trying to eliminate that and be as consistent as we can, but it comes down to just practice. I think we’ve had a good [week of] practice so far even on a different week, a holiday week. I’m looking forward to going back to Colorado, finishing the week tomorrow with Friday’s practice and show them what we’ve been doing during this week. I think the consistency is beginning to grow just because I think we’ve actually — whether it’s the way we’re talking about practice and how important it is or just the mindset, as far as, ‘Hey guys, we can’t keep going up-and-down like this.’ Whatever it is, something has changed as far as our mindset, coming to practice and attacking the week, which has allowed us to look like we’re playing better — just more consistent is how I say it.”

On ‘what was going through his mind in that wild fourth quarter last week’:

“Just, hey, we have to go score. We have an opportunity and that’s all that you can ask for, right? At the end of the game, we had an opportunity. Hey, yeah we lost the lead after having a three-score lead, I believe, in the fourth quarter. Some bad stuff happened. We had a punt blocked. A tipped ball for an interception and a short field where they capitalized. In the end, they were up by three. We had whatever minutes left and two timeouts to go score. So, hey, it was the same mindset for me as it was in the beginning of the game — we have to go score. There was some type of urgency the way we were in the huddle, as far as — not like a panic, but we really need to score. We need to put it in a position where it doesn’t matter what happens. If the defense allows something, that, hey, it’s all good because we can go down there and know we will get more points.”

On if falling behind after a double-digit lead and coming back to win is ‘good for you guys moving forward’:

“Yeah, I mean, it’s great, honestly. As far as, hey we stuck with it. We were able to fight and continue going and ended up coming out with the win. Obviously, we’re trying to avoid those situations. We want to keep our double-digit leads, but that’s football. Stuff happens. Football happens. Sudden-change. We had a couple of them in the fourth quarter and it was Sunday night, too — the big stage. It was definitely a show for the fans, but as far as our situation, we’re trying to eliminate those. If we are in that situation again, I’m confident that we’re going to go down and score. We want to end the game with the ball. You’ve heard [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley say that, that’s why he’s aggressive on fourth down. He’s trying to score points. I’m about it. I love it because that’s the mindset that he has instilled in us and we carry that forward to the field.”

On losing a lead last year at Denver:

“Oh yeah, I remember that one. I was sitting at home because I had my hamstring. I just remember doing pushups after that game. I was just so mad. I don’t know why. For whatever reason, when I get mad, I have to vent. I have to start working out. That’s what I was doing after that one. Yeah, it just comes down to making plays and not giving up as many mistakes. I think, last year, we just were definitely not as consistent as we have been this year. I think that’s just growth from some of our players. Obviously, [QB] Justin [Herbert] being one of the main guys from last year coming over and playing at a high level — and our coaches as well, just as far as giving us some new chemistry, a new feel to the team, attacking games a little bit differently than we have in the past. Using guys like [WR] Mike Williams in the short game and stuff like that has really been an advantage for us — and us continuing to make plays. I mean, I can’t tell you what the games are going to be like. Shoot, I couldn’t have told you that we were going to be up 17 points and then blow the lead. Like I said, we’re prepared. If it happens again, guess what? We have to go make plays, guys. That’s what we get paid to do. That’s the NFL. Sometimes you come out on those and sometimes you don’t. You just have to make sure that you’re making it out of those more than you’re not. Those are the games that come down to the end, when you’re talking the end of the season and it’s like, ‘Yeah, those games, we came out on top and that’s why we’re in the playoffs.’ If you come up short, I’ve been part of a season where it was like, ‘Yeah, we had these close games, but we came up short and we just barely missed the playoffs.’ It’s the difference between

being a good team and a great team. A good team is going to go 8-9, right in that mid-area. A great team is going to get enough tickets, as [former Assistant Head Coach/Special Teams Coordinator] George Stewart our old special teams coach used to say, to get to the playoffs. We have to take advantage, we have to.”

On being reflective following the *Sunday Night Football* win:

“I mean, the game definitely brought emotions to me, but it’s after every game. Even when we lose, like [two weeks ago]. You’re just like, ‘Man, my journey has come so far.’ From a little tiny town out in Colorado, to go into another tiny town in Gunnison, up in the mountains in Colorado, and then coming out to LA, and not really knowing what to expect, but just knowing that, hey, I’ll give it everything I can and seeing where that goes. I’ve just been able to continue to build. I think, last week, especially on a Sunday night game, was just a really special time for me to just reflect and be like, ‘Wow, it has been a long [time] and a lot of work that has been put into this journey.’ I’m still looking forward to it and painting the path going forward, even in the NFL and even outside of the league, trying to help out the community. Even just with the guys in the room, I’m just really grateful. I guess it’s a perfect day to talk about things that we’re grateful for, right? Just, this path and what the NFL has done to bring people together, it’s really opened my eyes to a new lifestyle and even a way to give back and help the community where people really need help. It’s really shown me that, hey, life can go a lot of different ways. I have a lot to be grateful for — so much so, that’s why I do give back all the time, right? Not just on Thanksgiving, but just in general. I think that’s where it came from. In that game, just kind of was a reminiscent moment, like, wow. This is has been special.”

On if ‘the confidence you have now because of what you guys have done this season or just the growth overall, you, [QB Justin] Herbert and the offensive line’:

“I think there’s a mentality that, shoot, like [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley has put into us from Week 1. He said, ‘We’re going for it on fourth down.’ Obviously, we’re an offense. We think we have to go score on every single drive whatever the score is. If we have the ball, we have to go score. I think it just turns it up a notch, where it’s like, ‘Hey, Coach is literally saying that we’re going for it on fourth down.’ We’ve shown that all year. We have to execute. It’s not that we’re overly urgent or anything. It’s just, I don’t know, something in my mind, anyway, that I try to, you know, spread across the guys, like, ‘Hey guys, this is so serious. I hope you’re taking this with the utmost seriousness right now.’ It’s from the first drive to the last drive, if we’re down or if we’re up, because that’s what consistency is, right? That’s what will carry over from game to practice to game to practice. Then, eventually, it becomes who you are. You see these great teams that continue to be great teams. Why? Because their identity is at this high standard and their able to sustain that. That’s what we’re trying to implement here. That’s what it takes as far as having this type of mentality and having this type of aggressiveness and confidence in yourself to go forward and understand, ‘Hey, we need to go score.’ It’s not just, ‘Here we go, we’re on offense. Let’s see what happens.’ Nah. If it’s fourth down, guess what? The game might even ride on us getting this fourth down because we might — like we did last week — were we’re at, like the 40-yard line or whatever on fourth-and-one. We didn’t end up getting it. It’s like, we could have lost that game, straight up, you know? But guess what? We ended up making plays. That’s what it comes down to as well. You can have the mindset, but then you also have the players to match that. If you don’t have both of them, then it’s not going to work out.”

On how practice benefits game production:

“It’s always been there. It’s always been there. For whatever reason, last practice, last week we were so sharp that I think we dropped maybe one or two balls the entire week. I was just like, ‘Man. We are looking good.’ J-Herb [QB Justin Herbert] was throwing the ball in nice, tight spots. It was like, ‘Yeah.’ We were running the ball and having good reads. This week, we have Thanksgiving and are getting out of here early. There’s a little outside stuff that might be seeping in, but I know my mindset. We all have to individually hold ourselves accountable and then spill over and hold our other teammates accountable, too. That’s why you always hear me at practice. I’m always talking. I’m always trying to get the guys going and make sure they’re locked in and trying to have the best 10-play spurt that we have. The preparation — it’s all about preparation. When you get to the game, if you feel like you’re prepared and you did prepare well, now it’s just, ‘Okay, let’s just go show what I already know and what we’ve already done.’ That’s with any job, right? That’s with any job going into any position. You feel confident because you’ve done all the work. Now, what else is there to do? Show the work that you’ve done. I think, over the years, that I’ve seen the importance of, not just practicing well, but having a mindset that, ‘Okay, I need to really get this out of practice today,’ as far as my reads. I really need to be locked in on what the front is. The little things, really, start to show up a lot more the more that you understand the importance of preparation.”

On if the trip to Denver is 'special' given his season so far:

"I definitely have a crew [of friends and family] coming [to the game]. That's because in Colorado there are a lot of small towns kind of scattered throughout. That's where I came from. I still have that small-town support. I have support from both of my towns that I grew up in and went to college in from day 1 that I've been there. I still have a lot of people that keep in touch with me, congratulate me and follow my journey that will be at the game. I'm sure that I'll see them in the stands. They'll come down before the game. Yeah, it's special because that's where I started. I have some roots there. I still have family back in Colorado. It's always a great time to get back in the state. I don't necessarily miss the cold weather. Hopefully, we bring the California weather with us out there. Regardless, we'll be able to play and put some warm clothes on. It's going to be good to see, especially the fans that will be at the game."