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WEEK 6 — PODIUM AVAILABILITY

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LOS ANGELES CHARGERS DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR GUS BRADLEY

Opening statement:

“Just to recap last week, obviously, our start was not good enough. We came out and gave up two touchdowns right away through big plays. We had some misfits on runs and a big pass play. After that, even the third series toward the end, we settled down a little bit. We tried to do some different things to give our guys just a little bit more juice on the field in the second series. I think it helped out when we got to the third series, had the big sack-caused fumble. I believe it was that series. From then on — I’ve told you before, I think the big thing with our defense is that we’re always looking at keeping the point level down. When we look at it, from that series on — six points. We just have to do a better job at the start. We had some miscues during the game as well that we have to get fixed up. As far as the point total, it’s still not good enough. I think there’s a group of guys in there understand that, especially the first two series. You can’t give up explosive plays. When we give up explosive plays within a series, there is a good chance that it’s going to lead to touchdowns. We have to eliminate that part from the game.

“As far as this game now, it’s a very challenging team. They do a good job. Obviously, for us, we’re off and on as far as the run game. We have some good games and then we give up some yards. Going into a game, we go in with the mindset that we have to do everything that we can to stop the run. They also operate off a lot of explosive plays with their skill guys at the receiver spot, running back — a Pro Bowl player, have a lot of respect for him — and their offensive line. It’s a very good offensive line. They work very well together. It’s a very veteran group. It’s a challenging thing there. I think the quarterbacks, we’re preparing for both. They both have unique skillsets. [Steelers QB Devlin] Hodges has been very impressive. Going back and looking at him, even college tape, he has played in big-game environments and done really well. We understand that part of him. The game is not too big for him. He does a good job of keeping his poise. He makes really good throws. He has really good timing throws for coming in and not getting a lot of reps with the guys. He’s been impressive. He has caught our guys’ attention. We’re preparing for both right now.”

On LB Drue Tranquill:

“We went into the game thinking that will be a three-man rotation. [Reason] No. 1 is to keep guys fresh. Drue has the ability to play both MIKE and WILL. You’ll see a three-way rotation between those three [Tranquill, LB Thomas Davis Sr. and LB Denzel Perryman]. The biggest part of it is to just keep our guys fresh. With Thomas’ situation, we’re doing everything that we can to keep him healthy. He was going through an injury a week or so ago. That part, coming off of it, we wanted to keep him healthy. Drue has shown up in practice and done some good things.”

On LB Uchenna Nwosu:

“Well, he does a good job. I think Uchenna has gained the experience at that position. We really moved him full-time two weeks ago. His ability with what we do in the run game, he has really good strength at the point of attack. Both him and [LB] Kyzir White played really well in those positions as far as setting the edge and stuff. That was impressive. He has always had the ability to find a way to affect the quarterback. Many times, it’s been through effort. Now, the time that he has spent with [Defensive Line Coach] Giff [Smith], you’re starting to see some technique come along with it and some pass-rush moves. He’s starting to incorporate that. That was very good to see him. He not only has effort, but if he can incorporate those moves and really learn how to attack tackles and things like that, it will be to his benefit. He has made big plays for us over the last couple of years. He did again [this past] Sunday.”



On slow starts on defense:

"It's a great question because I look at it and I think it was Houston and we went into halftime and it was 7-0. Then in the second half of some games, we didn't come out of the gate second half-wise and do really well. We have to come out of the locker room better. Now, this game, it's the beginning part of the game. We just have to come out focused. Sometimes you look at it and it's one or two guys. The other guys are doing things right, but if you have a blemish and you make a mistake, it can turn into a big play. That's what's happening. It really is just everybody doing their responsibility, take care of that, don't do too much, don't guess, don't over-analyze, just do your job. That's what we've been preaching.

"I think there are always some scheme things that we look at to try to position our guys in the best possible spot. We'll always do that part. We'll always look at little changes that we have to make throughout the week. There are always things. I think in the second series, I started to run more pressures to get our guys going. It was good. We had a couple of tackles for loss, but then we also gave up a run where if we were in just our base defense, we understood it. I think it's just getting into a rhythm. As a play caller, sometimes you want to bring pressure to really get the guys going. Sometimes with guys, if they blitz right away early, it gets them into a flow of the game. We're still learning some of our younger guys and what gets them going off on the right foot."

On replicating high-energy players:

"Sometimes, it's just doing some things well and gaining some confidence. There is no doubt, I think after that first couple of series, that we took a blow. I thought they re-grouped and settled back into it. We just have to be ready right from the start. The unfortunate thing is just a missed tackle or you missed the gap. It's just fixing those things. It's not anything major, but a minor thing can turn into something big. I think the big point for us is just if we play consistent and do our job, we'll be in good shape. That's when we do a good job versus the run. The play at the end of the game, they come out in a heavy look and the run the lead. That's a pretty simple play, but we over-analyzed it, jumped out of a gap and the next thing you know, it goes for a long play. It can happen when you try to make plays. You're trying to make a big play, in that situation, trying to get the ball back to the offense and you try to take a shot. You're more in that mentality, but that's the last thing you can do right there. Do your job and then take a shot, in that order."

On Steelers WR JuJu Smith-Schuster:

"You look at explosive plays, he leads the team. Obviously, he's a guy that they want to get the ball to. He does a great job. We have a lot of respect for him as a route runner. He's a guy that can make big plays. They do all sorts of combinations with him. They'll send him deep, they'll run shallow crosses, pivot routes. There's a wide combination of what he's doing. You can see. He has been impressive on tape. Our guys are very well aware of him this week."

On preparing for two quarterbacks:

"Just the unknown and how to handle different situations. Going back and having to watch college tape, having to watch preseason tape to just get a feel for [Devlin Hodges] as a player. How much will the offense change? Pittsburgh has come out and run wildcat. You probably wouldn't think that they'd do that two years ago, but with their quarterback getting hurt, they have kind of had to change some things up. There's a little bit of an unknown with his skillset if he is playing. What are they going to do with him? Do they trust him to be a read-option guy? Is it going to get into that? We really just have to play some of that stuff 'rules ball' and just go for it, and probably make adjustments during the game as we see the personality that they take on."

On CB Casey Hayward Jr.:

"He's made some plays. Casey has done a good job. Casey is a very instinctive football player. He can see the ball and has a good feel for the routes. He just is smart out there. He understands concepts. I guess the big thing is that he sees the big picture and it allows him to make some plays. He's a very instinctive player.

"He's been very important because you can count on him. You know what you're going to get from him every game. He's a pro. I know that he missed a practice last week, but he's a guy that really studies and he's in-tune to it even if he misses a practice here or there."

On S Roderic Teamer:

"Well, he's gotten better. He's a guy that the first game, he gave up a couple of explosive plays, but I think he's settled into it. I think there are some things where it's really trying to figure out his strengths now. What positions to put him in and what positions not to put him in. I think when you get new guys in there, it's really off banked experiences. Once they see something happen to them and they get beat by it, the next time they see it, they learn from it and they get to correct it. That's so important. Some of these guys, like a Drue [Tranquill], a Teamer — these guys don't really have much banked experiences to draw from. We're trying to provide that in practice and in game situations. Hopefully, some of these issues that come up that they're seeing for the first time doesn't turn into an explosive plays."



On coaching tackling:

"It's changed a lot. It's something that even in OTAs, phase two, you're talking about the different styles of tackling. If you were to ask our guys, we have the Charger roll, strike zone tackle. There are probably four or five different styles that we may incorporate in a game basis and it's really based on the style of player. [Broncos WR Courtland] Sutton last week, that was supposed to be a strike zone tackle at the thighs. We got high on him and he bounced off. When we talk about a tackling plan, we go through each individual and say, 'Hey, here he is in space. What is your tackling plan? Is it going to be a Charger roll, is it going to be a strike zone, is it going to be a big boy tackle? What type of tackle are you going to have?' You show them on tape and then, hopefully, when they're in that situation, it processes quickly which plan to use. You start teaching it and hope that it just becomes ingrained with more experience and they utilize that."

On the long touchdown last week:

"There are some different things that we're doing to disguise things. [Denzel Perryman] would have help in those situations. We tried to change some things up with man and zone. Some of it is to make it look like zone and look like man, some playing man and look like zone. It was the right personnel grouping."

On Nwosu:

"He's a guy that, really, for every play, he's always looking for an edge. I think it starts with his get-off and effort. Really, really good effort. Then, it's just his athleticism. We've been really surprised. Here, a guy that we've brought in as an OTTO and maybe he can play some LEO. Then, he started to show flashes and now, he's a full-time LEO spot. He'll go through some ups and downs, but he'll only get, for the most part, better. That's what we need to do. We really needed him to step up. He knew he was going to be playing, for the most part, a full game. It was cool to see. Now, he has to back it up again."

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR KEN WHISENHUNT**On this week's preparation:**

"Well, I think some of the personnel is the same so you can look at that. It always changes, little bit of differences in some of the schemes that they are doing. Not the same things. I think just speaking from my perspective, offensively we try to change it up a little bit every year. Not necessarily because we are going to play an opponent again, just because you're trying to get better and there are some things that they are doing that are a little bit differently. Some of it you can look at, especially from a personnel perspective and how they play it, but it just seems to me, every year is a little bit different."

On the goal line:

"Obviously, we are all disappointed with what happened. We are better. We had opportunities and we didn't capitalize on it the way we needed to. I think it was one of those days. It was unfortunate. We've had, I know we've talked about it, a number of touchdowns that we've scored that have been called back and then those penalties have hurt us and they've put us in longer situations, so we have just not been as efficient especially in the last game. In Miami, we did a pretty good job with that in the area and this is one of the areas that we've always prided ourselves on of trying to be better and last week was not good. That's disappointing from the standpoint of all the work that we've put into it, but I don't think it changes our perspective of how we do it. We feel like, 'Yes, it was not a good day,' we moved past it and hopefully we'll do a lot better this week."

On what to improve:

"I think that we had some opportunities and we just didn't capitalize on it. Some of the things we just missed some plays. A lot of times there are things that are close that you feel like if we just get this one player, we make this one situation converted, it can make a difference and I go back to the Miami game - the second play of the game we hit [TE] Lance [Kendricks] on a crosser for about 20 yards and then after that we were rolling. I just think, give them credit, they played well. They played their scheme well and we didn't do what we needed to do. We had some guys in situations to make plays and we didn't make them. Some of it was the calls maybe. It was a total effort, not good enough, we recognize that, and we are working to be better."



On RB Melvin Gordon III:

"I don't think it's really a matter of incorporating him into the game plan. We're going to do what we feel like is best to attack an opponent. Talking about specifically from a run game perspective, we feel like we know Mel's strengths and we try to do that every week whether it's [RB] Austin [Ekeler] or whether it's [RB] J.J. [Justin Jackson] or whoever it is. The one thing that we've got to remember here, and we are just as guilty as anybody at forgetting this, he didn't have OTA's, he didn't have Training Camp and we were considering playing him and he had just reported on Thursday in the Miami game. I was shaking my head going, 'What are we doing?'. It's just in that kind of situation, he's such a good player and you want to get him in there because he can help you and I just think that no matter what we want, no matter what anybody wants, it's really a process at being prepared to go play. Not blaming Mel or saying it's Mel's fault at all. Mel's a good football player and I think we'll see more and more of what we know of Mel as we progress."

On RB Melvin Gordon III forcing the ball:

"Well I don't really feel like it was forced. I feel like we had a plan going in and it was necessary. These were plays that we thought were good and it just so happened that they were ones that Mel was in there on. There was not a concerted effort to say, 'Hey, let's force this on Mel or let's try to make it work,' we were trying to put ourselves in the best position to play and the best position to win and it didn't work out."

On the thought of when to play RB's:

"Technically, [RB] Austin [Ekeler] did start. He was in there on the first play. He wasn't necessarily playing receiver, he was playing a secondary back position but that's okay. There wasn't a conscious thought like that. Chemistry is something that evolves. It's not something that you just say, 'We're going to do this because of chemistry,' I think we are trying to do what we thought would work for us against that defense and obviously we didn't operate well enough, so it happens."

On making decisions:

"I don't want to make the mistake of saying that. We definitely, a lot of what we do, is trying to match up personnel. For sure but when you talk about running the football, we're going to run the same play and Melvin and Austin may run it differently. They may have the same success but when we are talking about the scheme of a run play specifically, if it's not a specific one, then we feel like both of those guys can do it equally well. There's certain things that each of them do independently well and we try to put them in those situations but in a general perspective talking about the run game, you have to have both of them be able to do your run game going into a game."

On RB Melvin Gordon III's performance:

"It's hard to make that assessment because we haven't seen Melvin for a while. I can't base it off of what you see off the tape last year. He worked hard in practice, he looked good and he looks good this week. Hopefully we'll perform better as an offense and Mel will get some opportunities to show that."

On G Dan Feeney replacing C Mike Pouncey at center:

"It's the way it goes sometimes. And maybe it worked out for the best. Feeney got a lot of that work in training camp and even in the preseason games. It wasn't because of anything with Pouncey other than giving him a little bit of a break. We felt all along that Dan could be a really good center, and he's worked at it. He's always taken snaps in practice. Even last year doing that just because when you have seven or eight guys active for a game, you gotta have guys that can have positional flexibility. It certainly helps that he got to play with that first unit in a lot of those games and a lot of the preseason. We have a lot of confidence in Dan and what he can do. He did a good job in the second half. Things weren't the greatest as far as that game goes for us, but Dan got in there and played well. We had one ball on the ground, which is just the way it happens sometimes, but going forward, we feel good about him."

On what he likes about G Dan Feeney at center:

"First of all, he loves the game, and he studies it, and he works his tail off. One of the things that I've noticed is that every day he was in there with Pouncey; they were working out together. When you have a great leader or a good veteran like Mike doing that, you can see younger guys grow. Dan's not a rookie by any stretch. He's played a lot of plays. He went through a touch stretch last year. That's not easy. And to go back into it this year and prepare the way he did. And he was playing well for us even before we moved him to center. You feel really good about what he did that way. You have the respect for Dan because of the way he's worked and overcome that and was playing well. He's played well for us as a guard, and we've been efficient. We had one game and it didn't go as well and he played some at center. We feel good about him going forward. He's got movement skills that you like at that position, and he's got good strength. He knows the offense. I think one of the big things is understanding the protections and the checks of what we're doing (in the) run game or (the) pass game. It's not like you haven't had someone in there that hasn't been doing it. He's as involved with that as anybody could be, sitting right next to the center in a lot of those schemes, so we feel good about that transition."



On QB Tyrod Taylor:

“We felt like we got where we had in the game and the left edge of the defense was soft and we had a chance to run it in and we didn’t block it correctly. If we make the block correctly and we go in the end zone then you’re saying, ‘Wow, that was a good play,’ so I didn’t doubt the play at all because we feel very good about Tyrod and the decisions that he made and he made a good decision, we used a technique that was not advantageous for us in that situation and we didn’t score.

“We got it in practice. Like I said, we didn’t execute the way we needed to execute. It’s maddening for us, it’s maddening for our fans, it’s disappointing but doesn’t change that we believe in the play or the scheme. That happens. That happens a lot of times on plays that are inconsequential to what’s going on and you move on but in that situation, if you think if we had just made that one play and scored, it could have made a difference in the game and we did and that’s a hard bitter pill to swallow but you’re got to move past it and move forward.”

On Denver’s defense and RB Austin Ekeler’s 15 receptions:

“They were getting back, playing coverage and it just opened up some areas underneath. We’ve got no problem with that most of the time because it’s efficient, you move the ball. One of the hardest things to do in this game and one of the most maddening things for defense is when you’re willing to check the ball down to backs and gain 5,6,7,8 yards a clip. We did some of that early but when we’re not making some of the other plays that we had a chance to do it, it has a tendency to stand out and say, ‘Well, why did this happen?’. I think if we had been better in our overall scheme, you’d be saying, ‘Wow, gosh, he was productive, he had a lot of catches and we did decent offensively,’ but we didn’t. It wasn’t really anything other than some of the plays were designed to go to them in space and we were hoping to make some plays out of that. Some were okay and some were just average, but I think a big part of it was in the last drive in the two-minute situation where we went down the field, he caught like five balls in that situation just because the way they were playing defense.

“It never really comes down to something as simple as just tackling. There’s a lot of other factors that go into it and when you talk about it, sometimes it is, I could give them compliments, they did a great job at tackling but sometimes it’s just the way it works out in the scheme. If we would have taken advantage of our red zone opportunities and somehow won that game, we would have said, ‘Okay, we didn’t make any huge mistakes, we moved the ball, now let’s see how can we get a little bit more efficient in getting the ball down field.’ so that’s just how it works out sometimes.”

