



Josh.Rupprecht@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jennifer.Rojas@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jamaal.LaFrance@chargers.nfl.com

Brock.Anderson@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Danny.Markino@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jordan.Colquitt@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Leonie.Strehl@chargers.nfl.com

Chargers Week 15 Media Availability

Friday, December 16, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the three players listed as questionable in advance of Sunday's game:

"They were all in practice this week, so we got to see them out there. Physically, they were good enough to practice. We'll see at game time, but they were all in practice this week."

On if the players that are 'game-time decisions' will work out prior to the game to determine their availability:

"Definitely."

On S Derwin James Jr.'s injury status:

"Progressing. He has been doing workouts and stuff like that. I know that he's feeling better. We'll see about this game, but definitely improving."

On the 'efficiency' element of red zone offense execution:

"We've had some penalties that have affected our ability to run the ball, where we get put behind. Then, you have to throw it. When, there's a second-down penalty, what we want to be able to do is, on first and second down, be able to run the football to get closer to the endzone and put more pressure on the defense, where they're not playing pass for two downs. Far too often down there, this season, we've been put in passing situations early in the downs, on second down. The space is tighter down. We definitely need to stay away from penalties, that's been, I think, a theme for me, when I look at the 13 games we've played. I think that we've had far too many of these down there. Then, you have to stay away from negative plays, whether it's sacks or negative run plays. I think that running the football allows you to do that. I think that we just want to be more consistent in doing that and create that mindset of them having to defend all 11 [players] and really allowing our O-line to come off the football and dictate the pace of the game. It's a work-in-progress, but definitely committed to making it better."

On OLB Khalil Mack's 'influence of the organization':

"I think that it's immeasurable. The example that he sets on a day-to-day basis, I think it's hard to measure. I just think that if you interview all the players, I think that they could probably give you a little bit different perspective, a different story, of how he has affected them. It's the consistency of how competitive he is. I think he has the highest standard of performance that you could have for a special player. The first team was a good example.; he has a three-sack game, it's one of the great performances that you're going to have, especially in a game like that against his former team. 'I didn't play well enough, I left more plays out there.' He doesn't accept that type of praise because he knows that there's another level that he can always get to. I think that that's something that he's really done for us. I think the consistency in how he practices — you know, he's 31 years old, he's not a young man any more in football — but the way that he practices all the time, and the way he prepares all the time, they see him doing all the hard stuff that football is about. Then, just fitting in with the team. When you go to a new team, you have to meet all these new people. He's the one organizing the team dinners. He's the one bringing us together. I think that he is bringing out the best in everybody. You guys saw what he has done for [OLB] Joey [Bosa]. There are very few people that can impact

players like Joey Bosa the way that Khalil [Mack] has. I just know that we're thankful that we have him. As he will tell you, we're going to need him to play his best down the stretch to get to where we want to go. That's something that you can always count on with Khalil, is that in the big games, he's going to show up and play really well."

On if the coaches are invited to Mack-led team dinners:

"No [laughter]. Outside looking in is the way that it should be."

On 'bringing the team together' as a coaching staff:

"The transparency of the game-planning process, transparency of how you're doing things from a week-to-week basis, making sure that everybody sees the value in everyone's work. We try to show as much of the post-practice stuff, where you see [QB] Easton Stick have 62 throws after practice, and all of the people that are involved in making that happen. You just know that everyone has an important role. Last week, [WR] Joe Reed was playing [Dolphins WR] Tyreek Hill during the week, showing them how that impacted our performance on defense, and that everybody has a role in that. That's how you bring people together, so that everyone knows that they have an important piece in becoming the team that you're capable of being. Just showing as many examples as possible, we try to do that. Then, just the way that we meet and the way that we practice, that's how we believe in doing it. That has to continue down the stretch. Then, hopefully, these guys take over the team and it becomes their team. Then, they can take us to where we want to go."

On the impact of QB Justin Herbert's 'energy':

"I'm not going to try and interpret our players' feelings. I think you can ask them individually. I know, speaking for myself, there's a big impact when your best player is having fun out there. You want you want your players to have fun playing the game. There's so much at stake each and every game, especially when you go play a primetime game, when the whole world is watching. When you go play like that, you should be able to celebrate it because you've worked so hard to earn it. You've earned it. I want all of our players to be able to play like that, to compete like that. For him to do that, I think it makes myself, speaking for myself, it makes you know that much more confident."

On if it is 'good' for Staley to see Herbert 'celebrate':

"I trust how Justin [Herbert] is feeling. If that's part of how he's feeling, I want him to be able to feel that on the field. He's a competitor. He's cool 99.9 percent of the time, so that 0.1 percent where that War Daddy comes out, that's special, that's competition. Everybody has that, you included [laughter]. It's good for everybody to get that out now and then."

On Herbert 'letting that 0.1 percent show with it being his third NFL season':

"I just think he has more ownership in everything that involves being quarterback, not his plays and stuff like that, but just how he is around the building and his rhythm and routine. Familiar faces around the building, he kind of knows everybody. He has established relationships with so many people, so that allows him to be more of himself. This is just his third year in the NFL. What is he, 25 years old? He's just at the beginning. Every single day that he plays pro quarterback, he's getting better at all of the things that make up a pro quarterback. I think that's a big component in it."

On Herbert reaching statistical milestones:

"As someone who appreciates the game so much and respects the people that he's passed, when you're talking about a [former Colts QB] Andrew Luck or a [Pro Football Hall of Fame QB [Dan Marino] — you know, I saw Dan Marino before the game, I didn't get a chance to say hi, but Dan Marino was on their sideline — you know just how special the players that he is passing are, people that have shaped the game. That's what he's doing, he is shaping the NFL. I'm not surprised one bit because I know how special he is and I know that he's going to keep going. This is just the beginning, but I know how special of a competitor that he is. I'm out here every day with him, so when he goes out there and performs, we're probably going to be the least surprise people out there. He still has to improve. The big thing with Justin [Herbert], for you guys it's passing milestones — and he's doing that and it's incredible — but there is still so much in his game that he needs to improve. I think that that's what he's so committed to, is improving his game. We're going to need him to play his best on the stretch for us."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On WR DeAndre Carter:

“He’s been awesome. As soon as he stepped in here, we knew we had a special guy. I’m not sure how much he was used at his prior [teams], but he came here and has such a good feel for sitting down in coverage, beating man coverage. We knew he was going to be a special player. When [WR] Keenan [Allen] went down, he stepped up big-time. To have a guy like that, who has been around and seen a lot, knows a lot of football, it’s been really good to have him.”

On Carter as a returner:

“It’s been huge, especially this past game. Getting the ball on the 50-yard line makes a huge difference. For him to be able to make plays and make guys miss all year long — have a guy like that returning punts, not only on the offensive side of things, he’s meant a lot to us.”

On how WRs Keenan Allen and Mike Williams help when facing pressure:

“Mike and Keenan are both incredible athletes. I think Mike is one of those guys that have done just such a great job with those 50/50 balls and just beating man coverage. Keenan, the same way, he’s able to just separate and cause that separation. When you have guys like that on the outside, you’re able to get away with more. You have two really talented, special receivers that know the game. Know exactly that the ball is going to come out early, they’re bringing extra pressure. They have a really good feel for it. When you get all of that combined and third down comes around, they’re going to be the guys that you go to and will be able to convert. That’s really part of the offense that we missed.”

On his spike following the win on *Sunday Night Football*:

“It was just a lot of excitement in the locker room. I came in there and everyone was kind of looking at me to do something, so I felt like that was the right move. In hindsight, I probably wouldn’t have spiked it, but it was a good move. It was a lot of fun. I think the guys enjoyed it.”

On why, in hindsight, he wouldn’t have spiked the football:

“I didn’t want to disrespect the football or *Sunday Night Football*. It had the logo on there. I meant no disrespect for the Sunday night team.”

On if the ball will go in his trophy case:

“Yeah, hopefully there aren’t too many markings on it. It’ll be a good memory.”

On passing former Colts QB Andrew Luck for most passing yards through a player’s first three seasons in NFL history and how much it means to him to break records:

“I think it means a bunch for our team because to have guys like [WR] Keenan [Allen] and [WR] Mike [Williams] and all of the receivers that we have had over the years like [former Chargers and current New England Patriots TE] Hunter Henry , T-Billy [former Chargers WR Tyron Johnson] and JG [WR Jalen Guyton] and the guys that you have had for those three years. You don’t get it done without those guys. You remember all the good times you had with them and especially the offensive line who doesn’t get nearly enough credit. I think it is a testament to [Offensive Coordinator] Joe Lombardi and [former Chargers and current Philadelphia Eagles Offensive Coordinator] Shane Steichen. The guys that kind of put all of that together. To have a team like that and be able to accomplish those things, I think it means a bunch for our team.”

On if he followed Luck growing up:

“Yes. Being an Oregon fan, I watched many battles between Oregon and Stanford. He played a bunch at Autzen [Stadium], so I was able to watch him in person quite a bit.”

On the roughing the passer penalty in last week’s game:

“I actually haven’t seen it, so I don’t think I would be able to comment on it right now. That is one of those things that we kind of skipped over in meetings. I got the ball up there, so I would have to look at it again.”

On showing energy after converting a third-down and playing with energy while remaining himself:

"I think one of the main focuses that I have had is just that fun and to realize that, on the third-down conversion you were talking about, that was a big moment for us. To be able to celebrate and go back with the teammates, that is what I should have done. Those are big moments and you have to take advantage of those. It's a long season and for us to be able to stay with it and stay focused and dialed in, it takes a lot of effort. For us to be able to play together and play motivated, you have to have fun. I think that part of it is huge and having the guys celebrate and celebrate each other, especially the offense and the defense. When the defense makes a big play, get the offense out there celebrating them. I think we are at our best when we are able to do that."

On if it is 'hard' to let himself celebrate:

"Not so much during football. I think whenever we are playing, it's a different energy. You just go out there and you have fun and you don't really worry about anything else. That stuff kind of comes naturally when you are not worrying about things and things like that. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley and I, we have talked a bunch about that of just going out there and playing relaxed, playing free and having fun."

On if it is 'more natural' for him to celebrate now than when he was a rookie:

"Yes, I think one of those things when you come into the league is you just want to earn everyone's respect. You want to earn their trust and you want to be yourself and you want to be genuine. I feel like we have grown really close together as a team in the past couple of years. I know that I have everyone's back as well as they have mine. As long as we are playing together and we're playing fast, you are able to kind of relax, cut loose and be yourself around these guys."

On 'if he can feel his teammates celebrating that he is celebrating':

"Yes. Actually, [C] Corey [Linsley] kind of laughed after I gave the first down point. I went back to him on the sideline and said, 'What was so funny?' He was excited for that moment. That is not something I generally do, but to see that from him, I think they got a kick out of it."

On if Linsley laughing at his celebration was a learning moment for him about his influence on the team:

"You put it in a really good way right there. I think the quarterback is a huge influence on the team. I would like to think that I am able to do that for these guys. I think that was a moment that there was a lot of emotion behind it. It was a big game for us and hopefully the guys got a kick out of it."

On OLB Khalil Mack:

"He is an incredible teammate. He is one of the best that I have ever been around. I was such a big fan of him before he got here and even bigger now. The way that he is leading that defense, talking to everyone, he is never down. When you have a guy like that, you believe in him. Every single down, something good will happen when he is out on the field."

On Mack off the field and organizing dinners:

"He has done a great job of getting everyone involved. Trying to get everyone out there and just being a team. I think that is a huge for us. He has done such a great job all year long of being there and being supportive and getting those things set up. That is what a veteran does and he is one of the best."

On how the team has been able to 'keep their heads up':

"Like you mentioned, we have gone through a lot of adversity and we have been able to answer it and handle it. We have never gotten too low and we have never gotten too high. I think the important thing for us is just to stay steady and attack each week at a time. We have lost some close ones and we have won some close ones, but it's always about the next one."