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Chargers Week 18 Media Availability

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OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR JOE LOMBARDI

On scoring a touchdown in the third quarter last week:

"It felt great [*laughter*]. It feels good to score a touchdown in any quarter."

On how the unit 'found a rhythm' in the run game last week:

"I don't know if I can point to a specific, major thing. When you keep pounding the rock, eventually, it breaks. It doesn't guarantee that we'll run the ball well this week, but I think that we executed well. We had positive runs early in the game, so it was easier to keep with it. As you keep calling runs, you have a better chance of wearing the defense down a little bit, continue to get positive runs. The guys played well. That certainly was the biggest factor, I think. Have to give the players the credit."

On the blocking on RB Austin Ekeler's 72-yard rushing touchdown:

"It's one of those plays that everyone won of their blocks. [WR] Keenan [Allen] made the key block in the secondary. [Ekeler] ran through an arm tackle, and then we're off and running. He outran everyone else. It's gratifying when a play goes off, just like you draw it on paper. So many of these plays, you draw them and you're like, 'How are they going to stop it?' Everyone has to win their one-on-one matchups, and everyone did extremely well on that play and we got the big play. It's always nice to score big like that on a big play."

On how 'conscientious' he is with 'player milestones' entering the final week of the season:

"I'd love for [Ekeler] to get [*touchdowns*]. He kind of scores those on his own; I don't score them for him [*laughter*]. He'll get the ball. If he scores, it's him doing what he does. It doesn't really cross your mind during the game, unless if you're up by a ton, then you can have that luxury, maybe, of thinking of things like that."

On the performance of the tight end group in run blocking last week:

"It was one of their best. I'd have to go back and look at every game, but I thought that they did really well. They were physical, had good leverage on all of their blocks. I definitely would agree with the sentiment that it was certainly one of their top games, and that helped, for sure."

On the level of importance of the tight end group in overall run game execution:

"I think that it depends on what your running game is majoring in. Sometimes, you're doing a lot of RPOs and they're not as important, as far as being at the point of attack and making a block. Sometimes, they're on the backside cutting off. When you can have tight ends at the point of attack, it opens up your possibilities and makes the defense defend a lot more. When they can block the C gap or double-team on an end, or wiz back and be physical on ends, all that really helps. I thought it was huge."

On zero sacks allowed last week and the play where QB Justin Herbert 'was more physical than the defender to create a way to throw the ball':

"That one, might have wanted to eat that one. That could have been a dangerous play, throwing it out there. At the time, I was kind of relieved that we weren't getting sacked, but as I was watching the film on Monday, I was like, 'Maybe should've pulled that one in and not risked it.' Anyway, it's good, any time that you're keeping the quarterback from getting sacked. Negative plays are killers. We've had too many this year. It's nice not to have those, at least from a sack perspective, this past Sunday. It helps, for sure."

On lowering the offense's 'negative play rate' last week:

"This is such a short-run game. Someone was talking about a matchup, 'Hey, we could get this matchup.' If you're playing poker and you have a good hand, you play it a certain way, right? Knowing that you're going to play a bunch of hands over and over and over again over a lifetime, your advantage might only be 52 percent on this certain hand. On a play-by-play basis, that doesn't make you feel as good as, maybe, a great hand in poker does because that 52 percent, in the short run, is really not that great of an advantage. To your point, I think that we played well. I think that factored into a lot of things, whether it was a score, no negative plays, more rushing yards, all of those things. Hopefully, we can continue to do that. I think the margin of error between a game like that and a game where, maybe, you score 17 points, is just one or two plays. We just have to keep pressing and playing consistently, taking it one play at a time — not think that we've found any great answers because we had one good game. We just have to keep going back to work and trusting the process and getting after it."

On the offense's ability to find consistency in performance:

"The guys play hard every week. But, you've all felt that, there's just a spirit, sometimes, that gets into a group. There's a little bit of, I don't know if the momentum is real, but it sure feels like it's real sometimes. Sometimes, you just feel like things are going your way. It's easier to be excited and to bring that energy into the huddle, into the games. I never question our guys' overall effort, but sometimes there's just a little bit more hop in their step. Sometimes, you're getting success early, and that helps. One play builds into the next. When you get on an early run and things are going, it feels like you've got that energy, and when you're going three-and-out, it feels like you don't. I definitely know what [Head Coach] Brandon [Staley] is talking about. Hopefully, we can keep having consistent drives. I think that everyone will feel that way."

On if he can 'feel that spirit' in the meeting rooms:

"Sometimes [*laughter*]. Our guys, they save their energy for gamedays, sometimes [*laughter*]. They're a veteran group that knows how to save their energy for Sunday, so they don't always feel it in the meeting rooms. We try to keep them hyped up."

On TE Donald Parham Jr.'s touchdown and his journey from last year to this year:

"It was great. I'm such a big fan of his. Since I've been here, I've kind of felt like he's a guy that's just waiting to blow up and become a bigger part of our offensive and become a bigger star in the NFL. Injuries and some bad luck is has kept him from doing that, so it's good to see him get back on track. Hopefully, you can continue to see big things from him."

On Parham's attitude this season:

"Steady. He was never a big talker. He just keeps showing up every day and working, and that's all you can ask for. He's come back from a lot of different issues — hamstrings and concussions and everything that's been documented — and just keep showing up every day and working. Hopefully, we can keep him healthy, and we'll see what he's capable of."

On WR Mike Williams' one-handed catch along the sideline last week:

"I was impressed. When the ball left his hand, I started looking down for the next play, assuming it was incomplete. And then, they're like, 'He caught it,' and I was like, 'What? No way.' But, he did [*laughter*]. You're continually amazed at some of the things that he does, but I guess we shouldn't be because he kind of makes it routine, making those tremendous catches. I don't know if there's a stat, as far as those kinds of catches, contested catches, and your success rate, but, man, his [rate] this year has to be as high as anyone ever has been in the NFL. We'll keep throwing to him."

On Williams' catch-radius and how that compares to receivers that Lombardi has coached prior:

"I think that [Pro Football Hall of Fame WR] Calvin [Johnson] would be a good comparison, as far as catch-radius. There are a couple of things that go into it. There's what [Williams] did on Sunday, and then there's that catch where you're muscled in with someone, trying to get that catch — I mean, everything that Calvin did was A-plus. [Saints WR] Michael Thomas, he was so good at that, and Mike Williams is right there with those guys on that, as well. When it comes to contested catches and catching radius, I'm sure there has been maybe someone as good, but I can't imagine there are many people better."

On RB Joshua Kelley:

"He's a guy that always plays very hard. He always runs very hard. Some of the nuances, whether it's protection or reading a run — running hard is great, but sometimes those guys that just hit it, their vision, it sometimes lacks because they're in such a hurry. I think that he has improved on that. Just being a professional, you study your game, you see what you're good at, and then you see what you're not good at, and you find ways to improve on that. I think that's what he's done. He understood his strengths, he understood his weaknesses, and he's turning his weaknesses into strengths, and that's what a professional should do and that's what he's done. So far, I've been very pleased with how he has performed."

On if Kelley 'has grown' in pass-protection:

"Certainly in recognizing it. I'm trying to harken back to what I felt about him physically last year, but I'm sure that he has improved, as far as physically taking on the block. For sure in the first one. Mentally, he can see things and react to it and get on the right guys. He has been effective, physically, when he has had to make the block. Just someone that we trust in that role, which is huge."

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR RENALDO HILL

On Bills S Damar Hamlin:

“It has been tough. Obviously, you try to stay in communication with the family, other players that I had during my time at Pitt. It’s definitely hard because you gain those relationships, and those players immediately become your family. You spend time with [Hamlin’s parents] Nina and Mario and get to know them, what they represent. Just seeing your player in that position is definitely something that you hate for any person to go through. That personal relationship and connection, knowing that his little brother was watching, it’s just tough because you visualize all of that stuff and know that he was watching the ball game — and he wants to be just like Damar, ever since Damar arrived at Pitt, [his brother] showed up to practices and was at the games. Nina and Mario supported him at every ball game and were there with him, regardless of whether we were on the road or at home. You knew that he always had that support. Those moments when things happen like that, it’s definitely tough, but that has been his parents all along. They have been a supportive family wherever he has been, and whatever he has done. They have been right there with him. It is good to hear that a good, praised report is coming out of this, with him responding well. The power of prayer, it definitely works because there have been a lot of people that he has touched along the way. It’s good to see that people come together in times like this. Just happy for the response that he has been getting and we have to thank the medical people over there who have done a great job of being fast and being ready to roll.”

On the type of person that Hamlin is:

“A great person. Obviously, he comes from a winning program. Even when he arrived on Pitt’s campus, it was all about winning and how can he help. The community, that was more about being close to home, so that he could shape the way people view Pitt, the way that he can impact young people in the community so they can see him play up close and personal. To be around his family, like I mentioned, a very supportive family. He is just an outstanding young man. He is a winner. He is a fighter, as we see. He is doing everything and has always done everything to support his community and family and make sure he lift the people that he is around up. That has been him since day one and I am just happy to hear the news coming out.”

On OLB Joey Bosa having food poisoning prior to last week’s game:

“We found out the night before. He was trying to get some IVs in him, get some fluids into his system. The whole time, he was still visualizing himself out there playing. He wanted to get his feet wet back out on the football field and get rolling. He wanted to be out there with his brothers. He wanted to have that feeling of playing alongside [OLB] Khalil [Mack] like they had early in the season. He was doing everything possible to get back on that field, even though he had food poisoning. I am pretty sure some of you guys saw the introductions of the game where he is kind of staying away because he knows he has food poisoning, but just didn’t want to draw any attention. He was just trying to do everything he can to be on the field with his teammates. He did a good job. I think his best plays came at the end of the ball game. He wanted to get those reps. He wanted to get those reps because I think he knows the importance of it moving forward and us continuing to advance and get in the playoffs. He wanted to be prime and ready to roll.”

On ‘if the plan for Bosa before getting food poisoning was to play half of the game’s snaps’:

“We wanted to have him on a snap count, similar to when [WR] Keenan [Allen] returned. It was probably about 15, 20 snaps that we wanted to get him involved. We tried to make sure that we got him in those situations where he would be working with Khalil [Mack] and making sure that we can get him off the ball and get him rolling and let him use his skillset. Like I said, as the game went on, he still wanted to get a few more reps, so we got him a few reps and then made sure we got him out of there.”

On LB Drue Tranquill:

“He has continued to build as a leader. Obviously, we needed more this year than any time just because at the times when [S] Derwin [James Jr.] is out, Joey [Bosa] is out. Having somebody that has command behind the ball, making sure he that gets guys lined up and knows the defense in and out. We knew those moments would make us stronger and he received it well. He didn’t shy away from it. Those are the things that you want in a leader, to take charge when it’s time to take charge. It could have been at that point of the season where it could have went either way, but having good leadership to take control of those situations, I think that is what Drue [Tranquill] has been able to bring to this ball club.”

On Tranquill's pass rush:

"I think it was important, just as a coaching staff, that we are always searching for, 'How can we create that?' We go back and look at all of the rushes and a lot of those rushes we had, whether it is Year 1 or Year 2, Drue [Tranquill] was very productive. We wanted to make sure that we kind of expressed that and let him know that this was going to be a part of his role. Once again, he is stepping up to that challenge. He has had some great rushes against some talented guys. He has been able to win and I think if you can add that element along with getting everybody healthy, it makes it hard to decide where they want to slide their protections just based on everybody being effective and productive. It just makes our team that much stronger and we want to continue to encourage that trait that Drue has been bringing to our defense."

On the success of the defense without S Derwin James Jr. over the last few weeks:

"I think it is one of those things where guys are just continuing to lean on each other a little bit more. Know that when Derwin [James Jr.] is out there, he can erase so much. Whether it goes bad, he can make it look like it is a positive play. That is the element of the game that he brings is that he is so explosive that he can erase a ball that is thrown in the area or chasing it down from the back side. He has those elements. I think when he is not there, I think it is a little bit more urgent for the guys to make sure that they are on point, that they are communicating with each other a little extra because we don't have that element. It has allowed us to play better ball and I think it is just an urgency when those guys know he is not there, these reps have to be almost perfect. It has helped our team in that way, but we wouldn't want to be playing without Derwin moving forward. We are happy for the moments that the times he wasn't in there, I think it helped us as a ball club. Helped us grow as a ball club and help us be more urgent in our play."

On the difference in offensive play-calling since Jerry Rosburg was named Interim Head Coach of the Broncos:

"You saw a few new sprinkles of different plays that they were trying to incorporate. They had the run element a little bit more with [Broncos QB] Russell [Wilson]. There were a lot of similarities to things that you saw with [former Broncos Head Coach Nathaniel] Hackett and those guys doing it in Green Bay. It started to express itself a little bit more this past week. It just seemed like they were coming alive. They were moving the ball and they were finding different ways to move the ball. It wasn't just a traditional run game. When you add that Russell piece of him running the ball, I think it opens up so many other lanes. Them putting up 24 points, it helps the defense. You just think about those elements if they were able to score those points all season long, this would be a tough team, probably a playoff team, the way the defense has been playing. I think it is encouraging for them moving forward. Obviously, we know we are going to get their best punch this week and we have to be ready to go. They are not a team that is dead at all and they are showing it. They are moving the ball, trying to push the ball down the field and looking for those explosive [plays]."