

Chargers Week 15 Media Availability

Tuesday, December 12, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On QB Easton Stick:

"I thought that there was a lot to build off of from that last game. He has been with us all three years. Our guys have a lot of confidence in Easton [Stick]. I know that they've shared that with you guys. I think the way that he played in that second half does give us confidence going into this game. He is a winner. You take a look at his track record at North Dakota State, that's all that he has ever done, is win. He knows how to run a team, lead a team. He has been great for our team since I've been here. We're excited for him."

On the 'best thing' about Stick:

"He's a gym rat. He's a commander out there. People believe in him because of how hard he works. Since I've been here, him and [QB] Justin [Herbert] set a very high bar for everybody else, in terms of how to work, how to compete. I think that he has gotten better every single year and I think that his teammates have seen that. He has improved every year as a quarterback. Now, he gets to show what he can do."

On 'the prognosis moving forward' with Herbert:

"A successful surgery. It went well today. He's on the road to recovery."

On Stick's performance in the second half of last week's game benefitting his preparation for his first NFL start:

"It's good to get into the rhythm of a game, regardless of what position that you play, but especially quarterback. I thought that was what happened in the second half. He was able to get into the flow of the game, get used to what defenses they were playing, what coverages they were playing. I thought that he did a really good job of attacking in the second half and moving the team. What he has to do is just play within himself, which is what he does. He doesn't try to do too much out there — just stay within himself, let the offense work for you. We have to play team offense on Thursday."

On sustaining an injury to the starting quarterback:

"It's like when you lose any player of that caliber, it's tough. But, that's why you have a team. You have to be able to support that position and put a good plan together moving forward. One of the reasons why I was so excited to team up with [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore] was the work that he did with [Cowboys QB] Cooper Rush. [Cowboys QB] Dak Prescott went down and they went on that really good run with Cooper Rush as their backup quarterback. The way that they had to play with Cooper Rush was different than the way that they were playing with Dak, but that's what you have to do, you have to make adjustments. Then, the rest of your team has to come alive and you have to play the game the way that it needs to be played in order to win. That's what we're going to try and do on Thursday."

On if he is 'expecting' to have WR Keenan Allen available:

"I don't know that yet."

On Stick's 'greatest strength as a quarterback':

"His smarts. I think that he is really, really smart. He can see the field, see the defense before the snap, get us into the right play. Post-snap, he can see the field, which is important. There are a lot of people that can see the game before the snap, but once the ball is snapped, how do you play? He has good instincts. His legs really give him a chance to be a playmaker out there. The NFL, it's crowded. You need to be able to use your feet to move. He has real athleticism for the position, which I think will create more opportunities. That is one of Justin's really good traits. When you have mobility and athleticism, you can create things off-schedule. That's what you have to be able to do. I think that Easton will be able to give us that element."

On Stick's experience:

"When you look at his background at North Dakota State, you don't win that many games and play in that many big games — he was the runner-up for the Walter Payton Award — this guy has accomplished a lot. He has a lot of confidence in himself. He has been with us a long time, he is very comfortable working with Kellen [Moore]. Like I said, it's an exciting time for him."

On 'if ball security and poise in the pocket is a focus this week' with Stick:

"You sound like a coach [*laughter*]. Yeah, you have to keep the main thing, the main thing at quarterback. When you can take care of the ball, be strong with the ball, that's going to give yourself a chance to win, no matter what the statistics are around you. That's the number one job of a quarterback. My high school coach, Bob Ritley, said, 'Your job is to make first downs and take care of the ball. How you make those first downs, I think, come a lot of different ways. I think that that's a strength of the Easton's. Now, he gets a chance, for a full game, to be strong with the ball, to move the team. That's going to be at a premium on Thursday.'"

On the team 'making a final push':

"This group has really good makeup. I think you've seen that through 13 games. I expect that to continue and I think that any time you're faced with an obstacle like this, and this is as big of an obstacle as you can face when you lose your starting quarterback, you're going to find out about the locker room and your team. I know what's in our locker room. We have four really tough opponents in front of us. This one division game on the road on a short week, it's going to test us. I know what our guys are made of."

On if WR Josh Palmer will be 'full go' on Thursday night:

"He should be. I don't think the full, normal wide receiver load with his first game back, but you'll see him in action."

On 'how different the scheme is' with Stick at quarterback:

"A couple of things. Easton and Justin are more similar than different, in terms of some of the things that we do. But, there's going to be, like I said a day ago, they're different quarterbacks in terms of what passes maybe that you feature with Justin versus Easton, but that's every number one to number two quarterback, they're not the same. That's part of this short week, making sure that Easton is really comfortable and confident, and yet, we're still going to attack the Raiders and putting a good plan together to beat them as a team. Easton is going to be a really big part of that process in the next 48 hours. What plays are you most comfortable with so that we can go attack this team. There's a lot of work to do."

On the 'benefit' of facing a divisional opponent on a short week, one that the team has played once already:

"They've changed a lot since the last time we played them, the coaching change, they're different in all three phases in the way that they're playing. They have really good players on that team in all three phases. They have some difference-makers that you have to be aware of — [Raiders DE Maxx] Crosby, [Raiders WR] Davante [Adams], [Raiders RB Josh] Jacobs, just to name a few. They're playing really well on defense. They're rushing the quarterback really well. Offensively, they are a handful with this receiving group — [Raiders WRs] Jacoby Meyers, [Hunter] Renfrow, Davante [Adams]. It was a tough game in the first game and we expect another one on Thursday."

On Raiders QB Aidan O'Connell's development since Week 4:

"He's played more ball. This guy had a really good preseason. I think there's a reason why they went to him as the starter because they felt like he was playing well enough to be the starter. It wasn't like, 'Hey, we're just building for the future.' They felt like he was good enough to be their starter. He has played in more games now, he has seen more football. I think that any time you can get that experience, whether it's a good experience or a bad experience, as a young player, it's invaluable. He has our respect."

On if there is 'anything that Stick does that Herbert doesn't do':

"You're talking about Justin Herbert? *[Laughter]* What's going to be really good for him is to play a full game. I think, in the preseason, it was really important to us that he played a ton, to feel what it's like to go the whole way. I think that sometimes, as a young quarterback in the league, you don't get that experience like you did in college where you just play the whole game. You have to break it up between two, three, four quarterbacks. I just think that any time you get to play the whole way and you get to get into the flow of the game and make some mistakes or make some plays and build off it, that's invaluable, as a player. I'm just looking forward to Easton to get into a full game, us engineer a plan just for him, and see where it takes us."

On 'any coaching points from a protection aspect' that the staff will implement 'to prevent six, seven sacks like the Raiders allowed in Week 4':

"We're going to try not to give up six or seven sacks, that will help us protect the ball *[laughter]*. The formula is clear. We have to make sure that we're the aggressors in the game, truly making them defend the run and the pass and putting the pressure on them every snap to have to deal with us. Not being in those tough situations when you're behind, not only the sticks, but behind on the scoreboard, where you have to throw your way back. We're going to try and do this as a team. It's not going to be just about Easton, just like it's not just about Justin, it's about our offensive team playing together the right way. It's going to be a great challenge for us."

On if he felt that Sunday's performance 'was a step in the right direction' with the run game:

"I did, yeah. There was a lot more consistency in that phase. I think we had five or six really quality runs that were physical. The first one of the game was as good of a run as we've had all season. I thought that there was progress made, but when we got behind, I think it prohibited us from sticking with that, like we wanted to. but, I thought it was a good step for us, it was better than it had been."

QUARTERBACK EASTON STICK

On if he's nervous for his first career start:

"No nerves. Maybe on Thursday. It's kind of standard for everybody before you go out there. Obviously, this isn't how I envisioned it. When they selected me five years ago, this is what you want as a kid — an opportunity to go play. I'm excited for that."

On his teammates:

"We've got a great locker room. I'm thankful for those guys. I've been here. I've watched [QB] Justin [Herbert], obviously, [former QB] Philip [Rivers]. That's the standard. It's really high. The quarterback play here has been really good. Just trying to do my best. Like I said, we have a great locker room, a great group of guys. I'm excited to go play for them."

On outside talk about Thursday:

"Ignore it as much as you can [*laughter*]. Luckily, this week you can do that because there's no time. As soon as we were done on Sunday, guys were already doing stuff to get ready for this one on Thursday. There's a lot of work to be done. We're sprinting through the week. I think that's a good thing."

On his emotions:

"No, I'm not worried. I'm just going to go out there and play. There's going to be good and there's going to be bad, just like there was on Sunday. That's just part of it. It's football. It's not perfect. I'm just going to go out there and do my best."

On his game:

"I think just an understanding of what we're trying to do. Like I said, I've been here. I've seen Philip [Rivers] operate, [former QB] Tyrod [Taylor] and Justin [Herbert]. I've been able to learn from those guys. Just an understanding of what we're trying to do play-to-play. That will be my focus, is making sure that we're executing."

On the benefit of playing the second half of last week:

"Reps are the biggest thing. There's no other way to learn at that level than playing. However you get them, you'll take them. They'll always make you better."

On lessons learned from quarterbacks he's played with in his career:

"Man, so many. It's been neat for me because they all play a little bit differently, right? It's been in, really, three different systems. Maybe even four, if you look at it. It's been cool to kind of pick all of their brains. They've been awesome and incredible teammates to me. I've learned a lot from all of them and am thankful for those experiences."

On if he's 'talked to' QB Justin Herbert:

"Oh yeah, definitely. We're close, so we'll stay in communication. Obviously, he's got a lot going on. He's in the front of our minds, for sure."

On backup quarterbacks having success in the NFL this season:

"You know, I know [Bengals QB] Jake [Browning] a little bit. We were in the same [draft] class. It's been really cool watching him get his opportunity and have a bunch of success. We follow it as much as anybody. There's so much going on. It feels like this year more than any year. It's been unfortunate. A lot of the top players at our position have gotten hurt. It's unfortunate, but it's part of the game."

On his mentality entering Thursday:

"Ultimately, it's football. Look, I understand North Dakota State is not the National Football League, but I'm used to winning. I only know one way. This is a production business and I understand that. I'm just going to go out there and try to play my best."

On getting his first NFL start:

"It's exciting. Like I said, when they selected me, this is in your mind. This is what you want. Growing up as a little kid, this is what you want — an opportunity to go out there and play. To be in the huddle and to lead a group. I'm really looking forward to it."

On his arm strength:

"That's been the thing that I've needed to work on the most, I think. It's all of it, right? It starts with your feet all the way up. I was probably a little bit behind when I got here compared to other guys. I didn't grow up with a quarterback coach and some of those things. I played sports. At North Dakota State, we run the football a ton. We were involved in the quarterback run game. Yeah, I was probably a little bit behind. I've put a lot of work in. I'm just excited to go play."

On the work he's put in to improve his skills:

"I've definitely seen some guys [coaches]. There's a lot of really good coaches, especially out here in the area, that have been great to be around. I would say, mainly, out here at Hoag [Performance Center]. On these fields with [former Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day, [former Offensive Coordinator] Shane Steichen all the way back. [Offensive Quality Control Coach] Chandler Whitmer has been huge for my development. I can't say enough good things about Chandler. And then, [Quarterbacks Coach Doug] Nuss [Nussmeier] this year. We've had a ton of really good quarterback coaches. And, obviously, being around Justin [Herbert], too."

On WR Keenan Allen:

"He changes everything. He's one of the best players in the league, regardless of position, but especially at his position. Seeing what he's done this year has been really incredible. It's been a lot of fun. It's been really cool for me to watch him work the last five years. He's a huge part of what we're doing."

On if he will have any family or friends in attendance on Thursday:

"Yeah, I'll have some family and friends."

On this week:

"We have about, what, 24 hours or 48 hours before we play? Like I said, this week is a sprint. It's tough on everybody. I'm sure it's tough on you guys [reporters and media members], collectively. That's the focus right now."

On not playing much over the past five years:

"Like I've said, you're a competitor. You want to be out there, but you understand the dynamics and you understand the dynamics of this league. Let's be honest, it's hard to sit in that meeting room and watch Philip Rivers, watch Justin Herbert and say, 'Yeah, I should be out there.' There's some reality to that, for sure. I've had a ton of things that I've needed to get better at. That's just part of it."

On speaking with coaches about the game plan for Thursday:

"Yeah, there's definitely that dialogue with [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore], with [Quarterbacks Coach Doug] Nuss [Nussmeier], with [Offensive Line Coach Brendan] Nuge [Nugent] — with everybody. Making sure we're on the same page, especially on a short week. That's the biggest thing, is really honing in on your plan and making sure you understand snap-to-snap what's going on."

On if he's thought about stepping into the huddle for the first time on Thursday:

"No, I haven't. I'm very much an in-the-moment person. That's how we treated it last Sunday when we went in there. That's what we'll do again on Thursday night."

On how facing pressure against Denver helps prepare for Las Vegas:

"Oh, it will be huge. Like I said, there's no way around it — reps are the way you get better. Live reps. That was huge to get some of those under my belt. Look, we're playing a really good defense. They haven't let up very many points this year, especially lately. They have a really good rush. They've added a guy in the secondary that's a really good player. The linebackers play really fast. It's a big challenge."

On the confidence gained from his touchdown drive on Sunday:

"It was good to move the football. Obviously, explosive plays are a huge part of that, if you can get them. It makes it a lot easier. [WR Quentin] Q [Johnston] made an unbelievable play tracking the ball. The protection was great. That's what really gets it started. Then, [Q] made a great snag on the in-cut the next play. It got us down there and gave us a chance. That was huge for everybody."

On preparing for the game as a starter:

"It's not much different other than the fact that there's some certainty behind it. You that, at least, the first snap that you'll be out there. You have to prepare like you're the guy every week. That's just part of it. Obviously, you're balancing that with helping Justin [Herbert], with helping the other guys get ready to play. Beyond that, especially in a short week when you're really not practicing anyway, it's really similar."

On the speed of the game in preseason compared to regular season:

"Look, you're playing [Broncos S] Justin Simmons. You're playing [Broncos CB] Pat Surtain [II], [Broncos OLB Baron] Browning. Some of those rushers and linebackers in Denver are really good. It was fast. Those guys play and play fast. They've seen a lot of football. There's definitely a difference in speed. It had been a long time since August. There's a difference for sure."

On if fellow North Dakota State alumni Cowboys QB Trey Lance or QB Carson Wentz reached out:

"I've had a lot of people reach out. Both of those guys, yeah. It's kind of a cool thing that we have all being from the same school and all overlapping, at least at some point. They're both good friends."

"Yeah, everybody. People still at North Dakota State. We have coaches that are at Wyoming now, Kansas State. All over the place. It's been cool."

On preparing for 'trash talking':

"It's part of the game. Sometimes it's fun [*laughter*]. It's all part of it."

"Like I said, it's part of the game. They have really good players. We'll be ready."

On if he's 'excited' to show his improvement:

"I think so. Just the opportunity at large, in total, is really exciting. I know I've improved. I think that is what it is. I know it out here. We spend a lot of time out here. Obviously, it's different. You're going out there and it counts. It matters. It means a lot to a lot of people. I'm excited for that."