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## Chargers Week 7 Media Availability

Friday, October 20, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On if he 'expects' improvement in the run game:**

"I expect it. We have a good group of guys. We're working hard at it. I think that getting [RB] Austin [Ekeler] back last week was good. Him being out for so long, I think that him getting his timing back will be important for us. We have to go in there and play a physical game."

#### **On if S Derwin James Jr.'s injury occurred in practice yesterday:**

"He did, yeah."

#### **On how the injury occurred:**

"Just a competitive play in practice."

#### **On S Jaylinn Hawkins' situation yesterday:**

"It was just a dehydration — heat, long flight. He was back today and in much better spirits."

#### **On the specifics of James Jr.'s injury:**

"A lower leg type of injury."

#### **On James Jr.'s game status:**

"To be determined. He's going to try and get as much treatment [as he can] between now and the game, and we'll see."

#### **On S Alohi Gilman's heel injury:**

"He's progressing. We'll see."

#### **On the personnel that 'could be involved' at safety:**

"[S] AJ [Finley] will be a part of it, and [S] Jaylinn [Hawkins], obviously, as well. We have to keep developing those guys and cross-training as many people as we can."

#### **On 'potentially being without' James Jr. and 'the impact that has on defending' Chiefs TE Travis Kelce:**

"You have to defend Travis [Kelce] with your whole team, anyway. It's not going to be any one person. We know that Derwin [James Jr.] is, certainly, one of the few guys that has gone toe to toe [with Kelce] and can meet that matchup. We'll have to make adjustments if he can't go, but our guys are going to be up for the task."

#### **On if Hawkins will be 'up to speed enough' to play on Sunday:**

"He has played four years in the NFL, started over 20 games. It's our job to get him ready and he will be ready to play."

**On the challenge in defending Chiefs QB Patrick Mahomes:**

"I think that the big challenge is that it is every play. You have to have the stamina to have that type of awareness, that type of discipline, and you have to compete. You're not going to keep him in there the whole time. Patrick has proven that no matter how you rush him, that he is determined and he is going to go. He's an outstanding player. It takes a team. You have to stay as fresh as you can for four quarters, because it is going to be that type of game. There's an element to him that you can't simulate. What you have to be able to do, when he is making those tough, off-schedule, creative plays, you have to have 11 guys that are playing hard and are swarming and doing all of the right things when it becomes a post-snap opportunity. Our guys are trained in what to do and how to do it. What you have to be able to do is you have to be able to do it over and over and over again, because he is going to compete until the end of the game."

## **SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR RYAN FICKEN**

### **On WR Derius Davis' development as a returner:**

"I think that it's unique for a rookie returner to come in and handle both duties, and his role on offense. I think that he has done a great job in that, just becoming a football player and becoming a professional. But, it's more of the situational stuff. We know that there are going to be some growing pains at times, but he has done a great job — his film study, to the practice habits out here. Just understanding how to be patient with the returns and knowing that his blockers, they're going to do a great job of blocking and setting up whatever return it is for us. Just making sure that we're patient with it and stay to it."

### **On S Dean Marlowe's 'shield block' on punt return:**

"That was definitely a heads up play by Dean [Marlowe] and by all of our guys. We do teach it, it's called 'Save It' technique. We use it in certain situations, understanding the angle. It's to save the block. You're not in a position to go ahead and really fit him up, but it's to make sure that you ensure the block and just allow him to get to that wall — or, whatever the return is — and then to make sure that it's legal. We're always stressing about penalties and making sure that we have legal blocks, no hitting him in the back or working toward that end zone which could hit him in the head or neck area. We'll make sure that we're always stressing legal blocks and not getting the officials to throw a flag."

### **On the teaching emphasis on that particular block:**

"Front him up so that you can keep the eyes on him and go ahead and finish him off as he retraces. I know that [Marlowe] threw the shoulder and the back. He was in a great position. It's all about angles with that."

### **On the depth at gunner on punt coverage:**

"It's a testament to our guys. First and foremost, it's very difficult to replace [S] Raheem Layne. That guy is a tremendous football player, but he is an unbelievable person. This team will miss him, but I know that we will rally and pick up the pieces because that is what we have to do. There is no easy answer to just replace Raheem, it's going to be by committee, the next man up. These guys are ready to go ahead and carry the torch for him. He has done a phenomenal job for us, obviously, but, again, it could be [S AJ] Finley, [DB] Ja'Sir [Taylor], [WR] Simi [Fehoko], we have capable guys. We have a great room. Next man up. They're eager to make that play and that impact for us."

### **On the importance of field position in a road divisional game:**

"Field position will be very important, especially against this group. But, it's no less important than, probably, any other game. It's a stressor that we talk about every week, playing complementary football — making sure that we give our offense the best field position, in terms of scoring or setting up a score, and then getting a long field for our defense. You're absolutely right, it's going to be a very integral part of our team success this week. That is something that we've been stressing throughout the course of this week, knowing our opponent and how important this game is. It's an important game, not just because it is a division rival, but because it is the next game and we need to get back on track."