

Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Monday, July 31, 2023 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On today's practice:

"There was a good pace out there. Any time that you put the pads on, you kind of start training camp with the physicality and the blocking and the tackling. That's where it all began, so it was good. A good tempo out there today. I thought it was good start."

On T Trey Pipkins III:

"No significant update to report. He'll be back into practice here shortly."

On DB Deane Leonard's development:

"That's an area that we've really focused on. He has really good speed. He has good size. I think playing with his back to the ball and identifying his press fundamentals, because he has a lot of good traits to work with. As you guys know, he made a really big impact on our team on special teams. Now, we see him as a guy that, at corner, we can continue to develop. As you guys see out there, to defend this group of receivers that we have to defend, especially down in the red area, it's going to make everybody better."

On the emphasis placed on tackling:

"It's the number one fundamental for defense. What it leads to is if you're a quality tackling team, you're going to limit all the big plays, the explosions. The way the NFL calendar is now, you don't get pads in the springtime, so you don't get to practice it nearly enough as you need to be good at it. What we want to make sure that we do, and it's just a big emphasis in this camp, is to tackle as much as we can — not live to the ground, but we want there to be as much contact as possible. Explosive plays, we gave up far too many last season, and tackling was a big part of it. That had a big factor in our run defense, as well. Tackling leads to your special teams and your defense, and it's so fundamental to your team. We're going to make sure that we spend a lot of time on it."

On LB Eric Kendricks:

"I couldn't ask for anything more. He's an easy guy to communicate with because he's seen so much, he's been in the fire. He has really good guys around him, too. I know that he's probably mentioned it with K9 [LB Kenneth Murray Jr.] and [S] Derwin [James Jr.], those guys have also been green dots for us. I think he feels at ease. If he doesn't quite have it, those guys can fill him in, too. He's just has such a good way in that huddle. I think that we're able to connect like a veteran quarterback, like an offensive coordinator and a veteran quarterback, on those deeper chapters. We want to take this defense as far as we can take it. I think that the fact that we have Derwin and K9 here, they can help Eric get up to speed. He's done a great job so far for us."

On the 'relationship building with a green dot':

"I had it with JJ [former Rams S John Johnson III] with the Rams, it just goes so far beyond going through the play call. It's the personal relationship, it's the professional relationship. You want him to be able to think and see just like you do. You also want to give him the freedom too. He's the one out there. If he can see something that he feels like can help us, you want to give him that green light to do it. That takes a lot of time and it takes a lot of commitment and trust. I know that we're going to get there. Like I said, he's a stud and he has good teammates that can help them out, as well."

On the familiarity Kendricks has with the defensive system from last season's scheme in Minnesota:

"That was a good start, for sure, but I would say that probably more significant was his background with Zim [former Vikings Head Coach Mike Zimmer]. [Cardinals Head Coach] Jonathan Gannon is my best friend, and he was in Minnesota for a long time. [Linebackers Coach] Jeff Howard was there, too. I know that system very well and how he's been trained, how he's been coached. That same-as, I'm able to translate it for him. I studied them forever, so trying to connect it to some of his experiences, some of his games — 'Hey, you remember that play when you were playing Green Bay, like, this is how we would play it, or we want to play it exactly like that. Like, can we bring that to our team here?' Just trying to connect all of those experiences, and that's what's been fun for us. Again, just getting him to play fast because that's what makes him special, are his instincts and his trigger on game day. Again, a lot of work to do, but we're excited about where it's at."

On WR John Hightower:

"He came in last year and did a really good job of fitting in. I think he got better as he went, got more and more comfortable. Through the springtime, I think he really established a good rapport with the quarterbacks and a good foundation in the offense. [Wide Receivers Coach] Chris Beatty, who — as you guys, the people that cover the team — he's one of the top coaches in the NFL. He's done a really good job with him early in camp. I think you're seeing John and his playmaking ability because he has real speed, real speed, and he has setup, and he has enough size that gives the quarterback a lot of things to throw to. He's off to a good start to camp. I think we're much deeper at the receiver position, just in general. When you onboard Q [WR Quentin Johnston] and [WR] Derius [Davis], and then you got [WR] Keelan] and [John] Hightower and [WR] Jalen [Guyton] coming here sometime in the future. We just like the depth of that room right now."

On CB J.C. Jackson's progression:

"He just keeps adding more and more, going through the stamina that's required to play corner. He's going through all of individual, increasing 1-on-1s, increasing to team. He has had no setbacks that way, so we just want to keep being smart. Like I said, [Director of Player Health, Wellness and Performance] Marco [Zucconi] and [Head Athletic Trainer] Sal [Lopez] have done a great job, [Director of Sports Performance Anthony] Lomando and J.B. [Head Strength and Conditioning Coach Jonathan Brooks]. We like where he's at. He just needs to keep doing what he's doing."

On DL CJ Okoye:

"What an incredible story. Every day, you're just seeing him do something for the first time and learning how to be a pro. It's an awesome story for the NFL and for young kids everywhere. To think about how he just started playing football and to be out here on an NFL field, competing in 11-on-1, it's one of those awesome stories that we can't wait to tell. But he just needs to keep working He's a ways away, but he has a great group of guys around him, an awesome two position coaches with [Assistant Defensive Line Coach John] Timu and [Defensive Run Game Coordinator/Defensive Line Coach] Jay Rodgers. Just excited to get him out on his practice field one day after the next because he really cares about his game and he's going to continue to improve the more he plays it."

On evaluating tackling of the defensive backs in practice when they're not tackling live:

"When we get the pads on, we want contact. You're not tackling into the ground, but we want your body on his body, we call that thud tempo. When you get an opportunity to put your body on somebody, we want you to do it. Then, what we're going to do is, as we go through camp, there's going to be more 1-on-1 tackling in special teams than in offense-defense, where we're in tight quarters and we're really forcing the finish. It's going to be great for our offense, too, because what you're trying to do is be a great tackling team, and then force missed tackles, because when you force missed tackles, that creates the explosions for you. We're just going to continue to ramp that up as we go. We want to see contact from these guys. If there isn't contact, then you're probably not going to be out there."

On 'ensuring that the competition and energy stays at a high level':

"I just think the level of player that's out there is going to ensure the competition. I think what pads does is it just raises the stakes. You get out there in stretch lines today and there's just a different focus when you have pads on and you know that this is real. There are too many good players out there for you to go to your happy place and see what's going on afterwards. You can't afford to do that because you're going to get beat, and then you're going to get beat out, and then you're going to be out of work, so you better come to the practice field with a lot of purpose. We have awesome leadership on this team. The guys today were fantastic. The leaders, you guys know who they are, you're going to see them and hear them, they do a good job of getting everybody ready. I expect that competition to continue to improve as we go."

On Johnston's development:

"I think that you guys are witnesses to it. He cares a lot about his game. He works really hard. He can make big plays. He's still a work-in-progress, in terms of learning what to do and how to do it, but he can do it. Like I told you guys, he doesn't have the pressure on him right away to go out there and have to do everything, he can learn from these three guys, who are all feature receivers in the league. [WR] Josh Palmer had 70-plus catches last year and he was our number one and led us to the playoffs. These three guys are as good as it gets. He can learn how to play receiver and we can find a role for him where he's impactful. He's doing a good job on special teams, too."

On 'the physicality between the offensive and defensive line today':

"I wasn't at the 1-on-1, so I don't know. You could probably tell me more about the 1-on-1s, but in terms of the team drills, I heard the way it should sound. We're going to continue to make each other better because there's a lot of good competition on both sides of the ball up front. It's going to bring out the best in everybody. This is the first day, we're going to look at this film and say, 'Hey, our pad level wasn't good enough and, hey, our angles weren't good enough, we didn't fit our hands right.' That's where you got to start. You got to have a starting point. We're just going to keep getting better as we go. Like you saw today, there were a lot of runs out there, and that was by design. We want to see these guys fit their pads and be able to feel what you need to in order to be good in the run game."

On 'incorporating' WR Derius Davis into the offense and 'if that will continue into training camp and potentially into the season':

"I think that's fair to say. It's a work in progress. I think you've seen him do some good things out there, but how he fits in with the group, I think there's much to be determined. I think what we're trying to do is get him a ton of work with that second- and third-group and see where it goes. He's definitely a guy that we can fit in somewhere, with that type of speed. I thought TCU did a nice job of it, as well. It's not like he didn't play receiver at TCU, he was a receiver. Now, it's just how he's going to fit for us."

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER KHALIL MACK

On the first day of training camp wearing pads:

"It's always fun putting on the pads. It's where you get to do the real assessment of all the players, know your game and still be getting better every day."

On his second training camp with the Chargers:

"Absolutely, especially getting to know everybody, having a relationship with coaches and the players. It's a lot more fun this year."

On the last month:

"Try to turn your weaknesses into strengths, and, ultimately, just get better."

On OLB Tuli Tuipulotu:

"He has a motor. He's a fast learner. I know he's going to be a great player because he has a nose for the football and has all of the intangibles and the potential to be a great player."

On mentoring and leading a young player like Tuipulotu:

"You try not to overwhelm him. There's a lot of different intangibles when it comes to playing on the edge. Knowing that he played at a high level at the college level, I know the game will come to him, but it's going to take some time getting used to playing against guys like [T Rashawn] Slater and [T Trey] Pip [Pipkins]. This is one of those things where he's going to come into his own and you have to let him flourish and not try to do too much coaching."

On if Tuipulotu calls him 'sir':

"Yeah, I saw that [he called OLB Joey Bosa, 'sir']. It's definitely different. We'll be making our way to Mr. Mack or something, at least [*laughter*]."

On OLB Joey Bosa wanting to focus on rushing defense:

"That's the mindset. If he didn't have that mindset, I feel like all of us have that mindset. If he didn't have the mindset, I'd be a little worried. Understanding what we want to do on the edges, that was one of the things we've kind of batted back-and-forth and talked about it a little bit this year."

On Bosa adding playing weight:

"He's a lean, muscle-mass type of guy. He's tall, 6'5" maybe. You can't tell that he put it on, which is a great thing. It's not like he has a gut or anything now [*laughter*]."

On his relationship with Bosa growing over the last year:

"Oh yeah, man. Just getting to know him, putting the time in on and off the field. It's continued to grow. We're trying to put something together on the field for y'all for 17 games, at least."

On him adding weight this offseason:

"Man, why is he telling my business [*laughter*]? He wasn't supposed to tell anybody that. I was trying to shock some people."

On LB Eric Kendricks:

"You could tell he's a leader. He's been a leader since he's been in the league. You can tell he's been holding down defenses for a long time. To have that experience in the middle is going to work wonders for us, especially in the run game."

"From personality to huddle presence, you can tell when a guy has played a lot of ball, especially by the way that he sounds and the way he calls out different things that they're doing on the offense. I've played with a lot of experienced guys. EK, you can tell he steps in the fold and has been an experienced leader."

On the offense:

"Oh man, a lot of different things. A lot of different schemes. They're going to throw a lot of different things at us. There's not too much that I can talk about, but it's been fun and challenging at the same time going against them."

On T Rashawn Slater:

"For him to be so young, he's savvy. He's already like a savvy veteran. He does a lot of different things and switches up his game. It's one of those things where you're kind of playing chess with him throughout the whole practice. He's going to give you some stuff here, but he might take it away here and there. It's one of those things where you can tell that he's one of the best guys in the league, already."

On Kendricks helping with the run game:

"Just the demand of getting guys lined up, especially in the inside, whether it's sliding them left or sliding them right. Making sure we, the front, is ready for whatever the offense is going to bring to us. That's half of the battle. Communication is half of the battle out there on the field."

On if it's QB Justin Herbert's turn to host team dinners:

"Nah, I told him, 'You have money, but I still have the dinner.' It's all good. I'll take it. He might try to beat me to it. He's a humble guy. He might not let me pay for it and we might have to fight it out a couple of times, but it is what it is."

WIDE RECEIVER QUENTIN JOHNSTON

On first day with pads:

"It was great. We've been building up the past week for this moment. This is the moment I feel like everyone in football has been waiting for — to put on the pads and get that thump in, it's been good."

On competing CB J.C. Jackson:

"I think day-in and day-out, going against guys like that is going to ultimately make me better. I'm always looking forward to it."

On his beginning in the NFL:

"It's very fast paced. It has its ups and downs, a big learning curve for me. At the same time, I'm getting ahold of everything pretty quickly, so it's been fun for me."

On picking up information in meetings or the field:

"Actually out here, I feel like I learn better."

On being on the field:

"At the end of the day it's football. It's what I came out here for, it's been my lifelong dream so why not have fun while you're learning on the field."

On adjusting to QB Justin Herbert:

"It took me a few days. That's just something you get used to, especially when the ball is right there in your face when you come out of routes. It's always a good feeling to have that."

On working with the receiver room:

"I said when I was first drafted the unit has been a blessing. Being under those guys, especially as a new guy coming in; learning from those multi-time pro bowlers. It's good for me to sit back and listen to what they have to say, take some of their game and apply it to my game and make myself better."

On the month between offseason program and training camp:

"When I first went back, I retired my mom and threw her a party, she's officially done with what she has to do. After that I was down in Dallas training, setting up stuff; different foundations I've got coming up. Mostly working in Dallas then came down here two weeks before we started up, got some extra running and was in the weight room."

On his football camp:

"I held a camp in my hometown. It was cool, planning on doing a part two sometime soon not sure when that is yet. It was a good turnout."

On pressures of being a first-round draft pick:

"For me not really. Being a four- or five-star going into college, all that stuff goes out the window once you're there. It's all about work at the end of the day, it's football. I came here to work; I don't really feel any pressure. I don't think I would be in this position if I wasn't ready for it."

On working with Wide Receivers Coach Chris Beatty:

"It's been cool. First time working being in the league with a professional coach. It was different at first but I'm getting used to it quickly. It's been fun learning under him."

On his personal goals:

"Starting off right now fully grasping all the plays. I'm still going through stuff with that, but it's been a good learning experience for me. After that getting a better feel on the field, still building chemistry with the whole offense. It's been fun."

On not having to go to class:

"That's the best part [*laughter*], it's just football. I didn't miss going to class at all, I forgot I was in school. You wake up in the morning and have meetings; I'd rather have meetings than go to geometry or something like that."

On the heat compared to Texas:

"I feel good out here. Texas heat would be about 106 degrees, we'd be doing this interview inside [*laughter*]."