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Chargers Week 17 Media Availability

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OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR JOE LOMBARDI

On the involvement of WR Keenan Allen in the game against Houston:

“I don’t think we had a lot of plays, to begin with — meaning, by the time we got to the fourth quarter, there weren’t a ton of passes. I think, what did he have, four catches? I think we targeted him two more times and had some other plays for him where maybe the quarterback was rushed to check it down. There was a multitude of reasons. I didn’t come out of that game feeling that he got shut out. I thought it was more of going into that fourth quarter, we just didn’t have a lot of plays to target anyone a whole lot, really.”

On the importance of getting off to a fast start:

“I think you always want to start the games fast and get drives going. That was one of those, it’s unfortunate. I think both of those [to start the last Denver game] were third-and-two or third-and-three. They were certainly convertible. It’s important. They’re a team that forces you — in the way that they play, they generally force most teams in a lot of third downs. I think that we had 14 in that last game against them on nine drives. It’s just something that we have to execute well when those situations come up, for sure.”

On the Denver scoring defense:

“I think they have good players and are well-coached. That’s the simple explanation. They do a good job of limiting explosive plays. They make you be patient and drive on them. Like I said, they force team’s into a lot of third downs. I didn’t realize it until this, I think we were 50 percent [on third down] the last time we played them, which would usually be a good number, but if you hit third downs over and over again, you’re going to have to punt if you’re only at 50 percent. It’s that, ‘bend but don’t break.’ They have really good DBs. They play the pass really well. There’s just a number of factors that make them a tough challenge.”

On ‘how to accomplish starting a game fast’:

“Well, I think it’s moving the football. You form a game plan with runs that you hope work and passes that you hope work, and have the right calls for the right situations. It’s just executing, moving the ball and scoring points early. I don’t think it’s necessarily different than any other week. You always want to start fast. It’s easy to say. Some weeks you’re like, ‘Hey, it’s important that we start fast this week.’ It’s important that you start fast every week. It’s moving the ball, scoring points and hopefully touchdowns when you get down to the red zone.”

On RB Austin Ekeler:

“He’s such a big part of our run game and passing game. He’s such a complete player. It’s a huge element to have him back in the fold.”

On ‘if anything has been surprising or stood out about’ Allen:

“I had a pretty high opinion of him coming into the season with just how reliable he is, how smart he is. You can’t overstate what an intelligent football player he is. He’s a guy that gets open reliably. When you throw him the ball, he catches it. It’s one of those high-volume targets that is invaluable to our offense.”

On ‘what stands out about the development’ of TE Stephen Anderson:

“He’s huge. I think I’ve mentioned it before. We kind of always had a role player like that in New Orleans — going back to [former Saints TE] David Thomas and [Saints TE] Josh Hill. Just a smart, tough player that is going to take the job that you give him and is going to do it the right way. You know exactly what you’re going to get out of that player. He’s going to do things right to the best of his ability. He’s going to figure out problems if it’s not exactly like it looked out at practice. He’s just one of those tight end/fullback roles that just solves so many problems for you. When you’re like, ‘Who’s going to do this job? It’s got some nuance to it. He’s going to have to figure it out on the fly.’ You let Stephen do that. He’s just one of those players that’s invaluable.”

On how QB Justin Herbert was affected without WR Mike Williams against Houston:

“When I say — it’s not chaotic, you know. You’re always ready for if someone goes down. Obviously, if it happens on the bus heading out to the game, you have a little bit more time to adjust than if Mike had gotten hurt on the first play. [TE] Donald [Parham Jr.] was such a big part of our game plans up to the point where he had that concussion. When he went out early in that game, that’s difficult because there’s so many roles — he was supposed to be the primary blocker on this role and the receiver on this role. You really have to give credit to [Wide Receivers Coach] Chris Beatty, our receivers coach and [Tight Ends Coach] Kevin Koger, the tight ends coach. When Donald got hurt, Kevin was like, ‘Hey, just call it like it’s on the sheet. We’ll arrange it. We have it figured out.’ Those guys did a great job for me to make it right within their position groups. Those guys did a great job, the assistant coaches and the players filling in knowing the roles that they had to fill as those guys went down. The players and the coaches kind of made it a lot easier on me, for sure.”

On RB Justin Jackson’s production:

“I think it’s huge. There are very few runners in the NFL that can carry it 25 times per game for the whole season. Having two guys that can give you production when they’re in the game is really important.”

On if quarterbacks are ‘being kept in a separate meeting room’:

“Yeah, we’re keeping physical distance. A lot of the meetings have been virtual. We’re taking all of the precautions that we can.”

On if quarterbacks always were meeting in a separate room from the rest of the team:

“Yeah, I mean — there’s a team meeting and then we make break up into offense and cover a few things. Then, break up into separate position meetings. There was always an element of that, but all of the team meetings and offensive meetings and position meetings are now over Zoom.”

On if the team has taken extra precautions in regard to COVID-19:

“I think, organizationally, sure. Like we said, I think the players are meeting and are in their homes meeting over their phones or computers. They drive in for practice where everything is outside. Those things, for sure. We’re trying to minimize their chances of getting it.”

On importance of preventing turnovers to win games:

“It’s one of those common things. It’s the most important things. Everyone says it, everyone preaches it — turnovers are the No. 1 factor in determining who wins and loses a football game. To your point, we watched all of [Herbert’s] interceptions this week. You’d say that most of them weren’t bad decisions or bad throws. There was some luck, tipped balls and what have you. Maybe some calls that you put players in a position where maybe they just haven’t had enough time-on-task with a certain play. Maybe the receiver fools them a little bit, multiple reasons. The point being that turnovers, when you go keys to victory, creating turnovers for the defense and protecting the football for the offense is No. 1. If you do that every game, you’re going to have a winning season.”

On ‘what the mood has been this week with trying to turn the page’ on last week:

“We haven’t noticed a huge difference. I think guys were certainly disappointed with the way that game went down. These are professionals. We do know that we still have a solid chance to be in the postseason. Guys are here working like they always do.”

On Herbert closing in on the franchise record for single-season touchdown passes:

"I don't feel like I can take credit for what Justin does. He's just such a special talent and player. I think, hopefully with two games left, that's a record that falls for him, in his favor. I'm sure regardless of who's coaching here, that guy is going to set a lot of records over the course of his career. I'm happy to be a part of it, but the credit belongs to the guys on the field. Justin would say, 'Hey, it's the guys around me that are helping me,' but he's a special talent, for sure. He's going to be successful regardless of who's standing at this podium."

On the tight ends all producing:

"It's huge. In this offense, especially, but in every offense it's a mentally challenging position. They're asked to do a lot — run game, pass game, formationally. We change personnel groups where they have to switch between whether they're the Y or the F. There's a lot of learning, a lot of nuances to where I line up and what I do. Those guys have been magnificent all year and, like you said, they've all contributed in very meaningful ways. I'm proud of that group. Like I said, Kevin Koger heads them up and does a great job with them. It's been a real bonus."

On the interception late in the first half against Houston:

"That's one of those where I probably called it a little tight — meaning I wish that we had 10 or 15 more yards [of field] to work with. [WR] Josh [Palmer] kind of got funneled in a little bit further. The nickel did a good job. He was further inside than we would want him to be versus that coverage. You'd like him to be climbing on that — the guy who intercepted it. You'd like him to be climbing right at him, threaten to the outside to get that guy to turn his hips and then cross his face. Because he got funneled outside, that guy never felt that threat. Would you have liked Josh to look and throttle and Justin to put it on him? Sure, or Justin throw it to the back of the end zone, but that's one of those plays where it was kind of new-ish as far as a concept and their time-on-task probably wasn't what it should have been before we unwrapped that play in a live game. They had seen the premium looks. We were only checking that play versus a premium look, but because he got funneled inside, it didn't play out like it had looked in practice. I think that goes more on me as a coach than those guys, as players, as far as that interception is concerned."

On if Williams would have been the receiver on that play if healthy:

"No, I think we had Josh on that one."

On the pick-six:

"That's a route that has an option on it. He probably made his decision count later than you want him to. That was more of a timing issue."

On the development of communication between Herbert and TE Jared Cook:

"I think you're looking a little bit far into it. I think the Patriots one was probably an experience issue with Justin on that one, just the timing of when he threw that was probably a little early. Then, on the one against Houston, I think it's just Jared taking a little bit long of a time to define what he was doing."

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR RENALDO HILL

On 'limited pressure' in the pass rush last Sunday:

"I think they just did a good job of doing some six-man protections, keeping their tight ends and backs in, trying to chip us every chance they get, just trying to buy some time for the young quarterback to make some reads down the field."

On 'what is missing' when S Derwin James Jr. isn't in the lineup:

"It's definitely hard to replace when Derwin's not out there. He's obviously the vocal leader, as well as the alpha guy in the huddle. His presence was definitely missed last week. When that happens, you're so used to going through the whole season and having him there, it's kind of like, 'Who's the next guy to step up and take that on?' It's hard to replace a guy like that. That's what he brings. He brings that presence. He's that vocal leader. I think he has a good sense of when things aren't going right and when he does need to pick those guys up. It definitely expresses itself when he's in there and it is definitely felt when he's not in there."

On James Jr. as the defensive signal-caller:

"He's so in tune with the gameplan. He's a force at every level, so he can communicate to the guys up front things that they may need checks on or anticipate. Same thing at the linebacker level. Then, in the back end, he can communicate what they're doing on those down-and-distances, just trying to help everybody at each level because he is so in tune with the gameplan. He plays at all three levels. I think that's something that you definitely miss when he's not in the ballgame."

On LB Kyzir White:

"The biggest thing, when you talk to [Linebackers] Coach [Michael] Wilhoite is that he's coachable. He's a coachable guy. If he's done something wrong, he wants to be corrected. He plays fast. You can tell he's not doing a lot of thinking out there. I think he knows his assignments. When he sees things, he reacts. He does a good job of closing to the ball carrier and being aggressive, whether that's making tackles or making attempts at the ball."

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.:

"You feel really confident when he's out there, whether that's to the field, if the ball is in the middle of the field, just knowing that you have that guy who has been a stable force out there at the cornerback position. He has a sense of calmness. When you do have him out there, it's not too big for him. He's able to go out there and challenge any receiver, whether it's a big receiver or a shifty receiver. I think he's seen enough throughout the season that it allows him to play calm and play fast. Having another game underneath his belt, after being away for so long, I think that he will definitely pick back up to where he hit his stride midseason."

On 'battling through the attrition' of the season in the secondary, having to play with multiple groupings of defensive backs:

"It's definitely challenging. I think that has helped us is how we prepared in the offseason, having guys learning every position. That helped us, definitely, because you never knew when it was going to rise up, as far as the defense goes. It helped us in the secondary because we allowed so many guys to play different positions. If you had that task when you had a guy come off the street, or you had just a corner playing the corner spot throughout the spring, and then say, 'Hey, we need you to slide inside and play the nickel,' I think that would be even more taxing. It's taxing in itself because we did have so many guys in and out of the lineup, but I think playing it how we did in the spring allowed us to have some success; not the complete success that you would want, but it gave us a chance to go out there and compete and play hard with the guys that we did have in the lineups."

On injuries to players in the secondary forcing defense to play with multiple groupings having an impact on the defense's third-down rate:

"We can't use it as an excuse. Obviously, everyone in the league is going through those same things, guys in and out of the lineup. We just have to execute better. From the coaches down to the players, we have to do a good job of executing, whether that's pulling back and simplifying some things, we just got to make sure that we go out there and execute. We put emphasis on it each week, and it's no bigger than this week. We're hoping to get off the field on third down this week and get [QB] Justin [Herbert] the ball back. That's the whole goal. That's the thing we preached today. It's going to be a third-down emphasis for us today. That's been the message across the board. Let's do what we need to do, have a sense of urgency, but we have to get off the field. Like I said, good things happen when we get 10 the ball back."

On where he has witnessed personal growth this season:

"The biggest thing is that when you come into a new system, those guys played a totally different way than how we played in the past, or been a part of those systems. The buy-in that we got from the guys, that's been awesome. Anything that we've needed to correct, whether that's midseason or even a week from now, those guys have always been ready to respond. That's always an upbeat feeling for a coordinator or a coach, knowing that you have guys that are willing to change, willing to help and do better for this team. As far as that aspect of coming in, as a first-time defensive coordinator, I'm happy with the way that the guys have responded. Nobody has turned a cold shoulder; everybody is trying to get it done. I see promise in that. I feel like with that, moving forward, that gives us a chance. I've been happy with the output by those guys and that's something to definitely build off of."

On the 'next step' for the defense:

"We talk about takeaway margin all of the time. How consistent can we be, as far as getting the ball back — getting the ball back and getting scoring opportunities for our offense? We did a good job early in the season of making sure that we got the ball off of the guys, but as far as getting it to our offense, I think that we have to make that something, moving forward, that if we get those opportunities, that we have to make it happen. If the ball is lying on the ground, we have to have an urgency to get it. If the ball is thrown in our direction, we have to make sure that we're taking it away from the offense because the way the league is going now, a lot of these quarterbacks feel comfortable just throwing it up in the secondary, assuming that they're going to get a pass interference. Creating takeaways, I think that's the biggest way to really help us moving forward in this defense."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.'s performance last week at EDGE:

"I thought that he did a really good job. We wanted him to do a good job of setting some edges. I thought that people felt his speed coming off of the edges, not that we got the numbers in the production, but I thought that it was definitely felt. I think it's something that is going help him moving forward, that he did have that high number of reps [at EDGE]. I think that he can learn where he can take chances and use his hands better, but it's something to definitely build off of. He is an athlete, so him moving around to those different spots, I think that it definitely helps our defense. Knowing that he can go out there and play a game and be effective as he was, I think that is something to build off of, as well."

On if Murray 'could move back' to LB this week if LB Drue Tranquill does not play on Sunday:

"It could definitely be an option. He's played at both spots. He's a good piece. Like I said, same as having Derwin [James Jr.] being able to move to different spots, that's definitely an option to have behind of the ball, along with [LB] Kyzir [White]. Then, if not, we can still be strong, as far as how we move the packages around with him playing behind of the ball and playing on the edge. I think it gives us some flex. We just have to keep exploring that as the week goes on."

On DL Christian Covington's performance as of late and DL Breiden Fehoko's development:

"I thought both of those guys did a good job. Sitting in a room with [Head Coach Brandon] Staley and [Defensive Line] Coach Giff Smith, we were talking about how good of a signing Covington has been for us, because we've had so many injuries. He's been a guy who has been around the league. You know that he has been a stout player; that's what he provided for us, a guy who is stout and is going to do his job, and be effective. With Breiden, he just keeps coming. We'll continue to develop the guy. He's strong against the run, but now, he's starting to work on his pass-rush moves. We think that's going to help us develop. Being able to be stout in there and being able to stop the run, both of those guys definitely gave us a presence in there, especially when all of those injuries were happening, those guys were able to step up. We feel like we can keep it moving with those guys."

On increasing the number of snaps Covington and Fehoko see per game:

"We'll keep looking at it. Obviously, offenses know when we have those guys in and how they're going to attack. They're doing it out of some different personnel groupings, as well, where most of the time in those base downs, that's when those bigger bodies show up. Teams are spreading us out a little bit, so we have to keep our eye on how teams are attacking us. If that's the case, maybe those guys show up on those spread-out personnels. I think that our coaches do a good job of making sure that we have the right guys in there, especially on early downs, and making sure that we can stop the run and play the pass, as well."

On the Raiders limiting the Broncos' run production last week:

"Just watching the film, you saw those guys playing with really good energy and effort. Everything wasn't always perfect, but those guys were able to get off of blocks, chase the ball-carrier down and not stay blocked. We have to take a little bit of that recipe and make sure that we're playing with good effort, getting off of blocks, not going one-for-one and try to get as many guys to these ball-carriers as possible."

WIDE RECEIVER KEENAN ALLEN

On preparing for the final two regular-season games:

“Just taking control of what we can. This week would be a big win. It’s a division game. It starts now; playoff games start now. That’s the mindset. We have to go and control what we can.”

On the ‘biggest stride that has to be made’ to make the playoffs:

“I think just coming together as a team, being able to make plays when it’s time to make plays and then complementing each other. When we do make plays, defensively, we have to complement them on offense, and vice-versa, then get special teams involved.”

On the first meeting against the Broncos earlier in the season:

“Just shooting ourselves in the foot. A couple of times we were driving, we were doing pretty good, then the turnovers — obviously, the pick-six, then we had another one. Eliminating those turnovers, stop shooting ourselves in the foot and getting off of the field on third down, for the defense.”

On ‘what has been most impressive’ about QB Justin Herbert this season:

“His composure in the pocket. The way that he is able to relax and make throws, under pressure, into tight windows. The touchdowns that I’ve had the past few weeks, they’ve been in really tight windows. Him being able to stand in there, make those throws and get to the second and third read and get through his progressions, it’s been pretty good.”

On ‘if any of his optimism took a hit’ following the loss last Sunday:

“No, I don’t think so. It was just a bad deal, just a bad deal. Have to bounce back this week, get our confidence back, get our mojo back and just keep it going.”

On the loss to the Texans:

“It was just one of those days. You can lose on any Sunday to any given team. They’re NFL players, too. They get paid just like we do.”

On the Broncos’ defense:

“They play well together. They know each other’s assignments. They help each other out. They pass stuff of. They communicate. They stay with their leverage. A good group of guys. That’s what you look for in a good DB group, guys that can communicate and play together well. That’s what they do.”

On ‘points of emphasis’ for this week:

“Just being able to execute, being able to stay on the field, not go backward when we’re on a good drive. Not have drops. Not have fumbles, interceptions, whatever the case may be. We just have to be able to put up points.”

On ‘how big it would be’ to have WR Mike Williams in the lineup on Sunday’:

“Major. I’ve been saying all year that he’s our guy. He’s going to get us the big points, the major points that we’ve been missing. It would be great to have him back.”