

Chargers Week 16 Media Availability

Tuesday, December 19, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

INTERIM HEAD COACH GIFF SMITH

On 'how the last few days have transpired' since being named Interim Head Coach:

"Obviously, disappointment with the way that Thursday went down and the failure of not being able to help [former Head Coach] Brandon [Staley] be successful here. So, disappointment initially. But, this is the greatest game there is — professional football — so you bow your back and go to work. The whole focus is on Buffalo, moving forward."

On 'challenging the captains':

"I think that has kind of been my personality through the years. It's a team game and it's a player-driven league. The teams that have been successful, that I've been a part of, you have great leaders, and in times of adversity, those are the guys that have to lead. Even if it's out of your nature to step up and be aggressive, this is what this team needs for these three weeks. We have a three-week season and we're going to play to win."

On what the opportunity means to him:

"To be here of the guys, to be here for this organization, to be a part of the NFL, I just got put in this position to lead and that's how I'm going to advance, moving forward."

On the timeline of last Friday:

"All of the stuff that went down, I'd like to keep that in-house. I don't want to be evasive to you guys, but there are a lot of emotions that go into those difficult situations, and I would like to keep that to myself."

On if the new role is 'thrilling':

"I'm a football coach. You have a game this week and you want to get this team ready to play in the game. The time for reflection will be in three weeks, really. I just want to do right by the Spanos Family, by this organization, but most importantly, by these players, to put them in a position to compete and to win come Saturday night."

On the signing of QB Will Grier:

"I think that gives us the best opportunity to win. He's familiar with the system. He's been with [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore]. We have a great respect for [QB] Max [Duggan]. He'll be back, he's progressing really well. We're trying to win these next three games and this was a move to help us in that avenue."

On an injury update regarding OLB Joey Bosa:

"Joey [Bosa] is working hard. Depending on how it goes, that will be the opening of the 21-day window, but he has had two good days of rehab, he's working hard and I expect to see him out on the field at some point [before the end of the season]."

On an injury update regarding WR Keenan Allen:

"Keenan [Allen] is working really hard. The heel has been an interesting deal this year with multiple guys. It's a tricky injury. He's busting his butt. That's the character of this locker room that was built by Brandon [Staley], they all want to play. If they can, they'll be out there playing."

On the 'particulars' of the heel injury:

"You'd have to ask the medical guy. Every year, there seems like there's a new injury, and for us, it's been the heel. [DB] Deane [Leonard] is battling it right now. It's a tricky deal. They're working hard, they're working real hard."

On 'how much' he is 'leaning on the rest of the staff':

"Tremendously. What I told them and the players, we're all invested in these three weeks. We have to feel that energy from each other. We're coming together. It was a great day today. The energy was great. The coaches are doing unbelievable. I just happen to be the guy that is in charge of it."

On the 'message' to the team following last Thursday night's game:

"We flushed that game. It's embarrassing. It was embarrassing to everybody involved in it. I take that with me, since I'm the man in charge now. We're moving past that. We have three weeks to show the character of the men and the coaching staff that we are, to go out there and compete. That's what we're looking to do, compete, right there, and try to win these next three games. The ownership is totally on board, wants to win, right there, and that's huge. That message was relayed to the team. That's everything that we're doing, our focus is on the Buffalo Bills."

On if there will be 'any changes to the style of the defense' with Defensive Coordinator Derrick Ansley now calling the defensive plays:

"There will be some subtle changes, there aren't wholesale changes. We're going to put the best guys out there in the best position to have the opportunity to stop Buffalo and give us a chance to win."

On additional changes in coaching responsibilities:

"I'm glad you brought that up. [Assistant Defensive Line Coach] John Timu will be doing the defensive line. He's a really, really good young coach. We're excited, the organization's excited to see him and what he can do. He'll be fully in charge of that. I'll still be working with the outside linebackers. [Defensive Quality Control] Robert Muschamp will be taking a bigger role in that. I'll kind of bounce back between the two right there, moving forward. We're excited to see these two young coaches. Y'all will be hearing their names for a lot of years in this league."

On 'this season and everything leading up to being named Interim Head Coach' and the staff changes:

"Well, I wish that I would've lost some weight a few weeks back [*laughter*]. That would have been a positive. I wasn't expect in this. In all seriousness, I've been in this game a while and there are always new things that come up. I've been around a lot of great coaches through the years. You just roll with it. You give to these players, you give to this organization. Then, whatever happens, happens."

On if QB Easton Stick remains the starting quarterback:

"No doubt. No question."

On the team relieving former Defensive Run Game Coordinator/Defensive Line Coach Jay Rodgers of his duties:

"That was an organizational decision. I think Jay is a really, really great coach. That was an organizational decision and we're moving forward with John Timu."

On OLB Khalil Mack 'having the season that he is having at 32 years old':

"It's amazing, isn't it? 32 and 15 sacks, dominant in the run game. But, I want people to understand, he is a better man than he is a player. He's a natural leader. He's a warrior. Obviously, God had a great day with Khalil [Mack]. We're proud to have him. The man is the one that's doing it. He's been awesome. Couldn't ask for anything better."

On his 'first few days' in his new role:

"I think the time that you get, and the people in this organization that help you, is what makes this place special. It's unbelievable how many people are there to help you through this process, where you can just coach. I'm very grateful for that."

On preparing for the Buffalo Bills and QB Josh Allen:

"He's a great player. He gets paid a lot of money for a great reason. We have some stuff in the plan that can help. I don't know if you ever stop [Bills QB] Josh [Allen], you have to limit Josh [Allen] and try to create some situations where maybe he can make a mistake or two. But we feel like we have a good plan, moving forward, into the game."

On 'the type of leader' that he is:

"That would be a great question to ask the guys [*laughter*]. I'm an honest person. I'm going to tell the truth. I'm very direct. I believe in clarity. There's not gray. And, I believe in giving. I've always believed in that, that's my faith. I guess that's how I would describe it."

On 'the players saying that he is more old school':

"Well, that's probably because I'm 55 [*laughter*]. Yeah, I guess you could say that. I believe in it from my playing days, to all the coaches I've been involved in. It's still a tough man's game. It's a physical game. You have to have your brother's back when you go out there. If that makes me old school, then I'm definitely old school."

On if he has 'been around a situation like this before' and if he has 'received any advice':

"Unfortunately, I've been around it. But, yeah, I've had multiple former head coaches, people reach out. You talk about just being grateful, it's a beautiful thing that people would give up their time to help you in a situation that doesn't benefit them."

On 'a piece of advice' that he 'found particularly helpful':

"I thought that [former NFL Head Coach] Chan Gailey had a great one. He said, 'All of those suggestions and thoughts that you had are now decisions. Good luck [*laughter*].'"

On the Bills' offense following RB James Cook's performance last week:

"They looked good, didn't they? They played well. [Bills Head] Coach [Sean] McDermott has done a great job of rallying those guys. It's a challenge, but that's the league. Every week is a challenge. You think you see a game and you're like, 'Oh, they'll win that one.' Then, boom, you get slapped right across the face. It's a challenge, there's no question about it. We know the issues that we have to address. What we want to do is go out there and fight and make Southern California proud of what they see on Saturday night."

On if his first name is short for Gifford and if there is a 'story behind it':

"Gifford, yes. No, I created a story to kind of make it cool, that my mom was in labor and Monday Night Football was on and they saw Frank Gifford, but I'm just making that up [*laughter*]."

QUARTERBACK EASTON STICK

On 'what the last week has been like':

"It's been a tough few days, for sure, for all of us and for a lot of different reasons. Thursday, obviously, we were embarrassed. That's tough to get over, that lingers. Then, obviously, the moves that were made the next morning are tough. You put a lot into this, you put everything into this. So, when it doesn't go well, I certainly feel responsible. I know that all of our guys do. It means that everybody failed, and that part sucks because those guys mean a lot to us, they were all in with us. For us not to play well enough, it's really disappointing."

On 'looking forward to the team bouncing back and responding':

"You have to, and we are. You can tell with the guys in there, we came back with good spirits today. [Interim Head Coach] Giff [Smith] has done a really good job of organizing the group and making sure everybody understands what we're playing for, that's each other. The guys had a good practice today. We're really looking forward to play. That's all you have, you don't get to do this forever, so I think everybody understands that."

On Smit's message to the team yesterday:

"That we're going to go through this thing together. That we're a team, we're going to stick together. That was the perfect message because that's all there is. We understand where the situation is and where we're at in the season. It's really tough, it's tough on everybody, but it's where we're at and this is who we have — and we're good enough, so we're going to go out there and fight."

On the challenge of the coaching change:

"We're in this thing together. It's been tough, but we're the ones that put us here. It's collective, it's everybody. Over the course of the season, it's become this. We have to pick each other up, we have to stick together, and that's what we're going to do. We're going to look forward to playing."

On evaluating the game film from last Thursday night:

"Emotionally, you just want to burn it, for sure, but there's a benefit to going back and watching it. It's never as bad as you think it is and it's never as good. As bad as it felt, there are positives that you can take from it and things you have to learn from, obviously, and improve. We put the ball on the ground, I did twice, and that can't happen. But, there are positives. We played hard. Obviously, we moved the football at the end, unfortunately, it just took too long."

On Interim Head Coach Giff Smith:

"Giff [Smith] is great. He has been here a long time. This place matters to him. People in the building know him, and they know him well. They know that he cares. Sometimes, as a position coach, it's easy to kind of lock in on your group, and there's a reason to do that, but Giff has one of those personalities that has a relationship with everybody, and that's going to serve him really well. Guys are looking forward to playing for him."

On QB Justin Herbert:

"I don't want to speak for him, obviously, but he's in good spirits. He's as tough as they come. You guys know that, you've covered him for four years and you've seen him play. We've all said how much he means to us. That's clear. I think he's upset. Obviously, disappointed and frustrated, like we all are — he, obviously, especially. But he's been great for me, for our room, even with [QB] Will [Grier] today, kind of getting everybody together. He's going to do a really good job of leading this team the last three weeks."

On OL Brenden Jaimes moving to center with C Will Clapp injured:

"A versatile player, and you have to be smart to do that. I think that's the biggest thing. He's smart, he understands it. Like all of us, he's excited for his opportunity to get out there and to play. He's done a really good job, did a really good job today of leading that group and. He did a good job stepping in the game. That's tough to step in like that and to take control. He did a good job. We're looking forward to it."

On preparing for the Buffalo Bills:

"They're really good. I think that goes without saying, especially as of late. They've played really good football defensively, obviously. They have a bunch of guys that have played together for a long time in a system that, I know it's a different guy calling it, but it's the same system. You can tell that they're really connected. There's a lot of air out there. They play really, really hard and physical, and they're connected. It's going to be tough."

SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.

On the recent coaching changes and 'where the team is at':

"I feel like we're in a good space. We came out here and got a lot of work done today. We have a tough game coming up this Saturday against Buffalo, so we're just doing everything we can to get ourselves prepared to go play."

On if he has spoken with Staley since the changes were made:

"Yeah, I talked to Brandon [Staley]. I told him, 'Thank you for everything, appreciate everything you've done.' I reached out to him."

On receiving the news:

"It definitely was sad because when you're going through something with somebody for three years, it's tough. You always think about the good times you had. We always want to get it right, but we didn't get it right the time we were here. It was the decision that the organization made and that's where we're at now."

On Interim Head Coach Giff Smith's message to the team:

"That we're going to stick together. Control what we can control. As a team, I feel like everyone knows who Giff [Smith] is, we all look to him as a leader. Like I've said he's going to do a great job."

On 'being a player in this situation':

"Like I've said, we try to control what we can control, as players. That's always our job. For me, I always try to look in the lens of, 'What can I do to get better?' We're not robotic to the situation, but I always try to stay in my lane, control what I can control and make plays for my team."

On Smith:

"He's a dependable guy. He's a straight-forward guy, a straight honest guy. Like I said, he's a guy that we all know very well, especially guys like [WR] Keenan [Allen] and [OLB Joey] Bosa, some of the guys that have been here. He's a great leader."

On Bills QB Josh Allen:

"He's dual threat. He can run it, one of the best running quarterbacks in this league. Also, he can throw it out wide to his receivers — [Bills WR Stefon] Diggs and [Bills RB James] Cook in space. We have to be ready, in that aspect."

On Bills RB James Cook:

"He's a baller, he's been balling all year. I always knew who he was growing up. [Jets RB] Dalvin [Cook] used to bring him to the [Florida State] facility a lot. He's a baller and hardworking. He's having a great season."

On Diggs:

"He's kind of like [WR] Keenan [Allen]. He's a multi-cut guy, always giving you different looks, moving around on the outside and inside. I see him as a Keenan [Allen] type of guy."

On 'if the defense is going to change' with Defensive Coordinator Derrick Ansley now calling the plays:

"I don't know how much is going to change. I feel like we're going to be who we are. Like I've said, we're just coming out and trying to get the right group of guys out there to go compete at a high level."

On 'how the team will react' on Saturday:

"I feel like we're going to respond well. I feel like we're going to come out and compete. We have no other choice but to do that."