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Chargers Week 10 Media Availability

Wednesday, November 10, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On injury updates:

"[CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.] is still in the [concussion] protocol, but he's progressing. I think that there should be an opportunity for him to start in a non-contact phase this afternoon. [RB] Justin Jackson is progressing well. I think that he is going to work into practice this week. I don't know if he's going to be available for the game, but we're definitely going to get him out in practice. Vato [CB Michael Davis], same way with his hamstring. He's still probably a week away, but we're going to try to get him out there and get him moving, with the hopes of getting back next week in the game. They're progressing well, both of those guys. [S] Nasir Adderley, I think that we're going to hold him out of practice today. He's really sore from the game. Just trying to get his body back. He played a very physical game. I think that we're going to hold him out of practice today. Just soreness for him."

On CB Ryan Smith's initial diagnosis of a torn ACL:

"Yes, it has been confirmed. It's a bummer. I was talking to him before the game, I remember being in Hawaii with my family trying to recruit him as a free agent. He just fits in so well with us. It's just one of those things. I know that it's a part of the game, but he was playing really well for us. He is going to be back, for sure. He was playing really good football for us and did a really good job in the game. Looking forward to getting him back."

On S Alohi Gilman:

"Alohi should phase back into practice this week. He had the ankle, which got better at the end of last week. I think that you should see him out there at practice. He's kind of day-to-day."

On the LB pairing of Drue Tranquill and Kyzir White:

"I think that those two guys are playing really good football for us. Those guys play really well together. As a tandem sometimes, who your buddy is, that type of chemistry really matters. I think that their play styles and their personalities feed off of one another. Those guys can both play the game in the modern NFL like you need to. They can run. They're strong. They are assets in coverage. They both can rush. They are our style of linebacker. I think that those guys are playing really quality football for us."

On the 'vision' for 'phasing LB Kenneth Murray Jr. back into the fold':

"That's an important question. We're going to get all three of those guys playing football for us. The good thing that we have going for us is that K9 is a special type of linebacker. He can play at a lot of different places and he can do a lot of different jobs for you. He's definitely going to be playing inside linebacker for us, but I think that we can get him on the edge at times, and then get him in some hybrid roles in known pass-rush situations. That's what we've been spending the time, since K9 got hurt, doing; formulating that thought process, that developmental plan for him, so that he can really excel for us because he's a quality player. This second half of the season, we're going to need him for us to be the type of defense that we're capable of being. I see all three of those guys being starters for us and being in leading roles for us the second half of the season."

On end-of-game ‘four-minute drill’ offensive performance against the Eagles and how that compares to a similar situation against Washington in Week 1:

“I think that there are definitely some similarities from those two games, specifically. We were able to do the things that you need to do in a four-minute situation, which is run the football, protect the quarterback and convert on third down. I think that we were able to mix it up on those possessions. Both of those drives demonstrated those three things. We were able to keep the defense guessing on those particular drives. We had different types of runs within different types of groupings. We had different types of passes. In the Philly game, I thought one of the underrated parts of that last drive was that second down to [RB] Austin [Ekeler], where we got him on a choice [route]. He was kind of in that pocket in a Cover 2 and was able to split that zone, make a guy miss and get a first down. Again, that keeps you out of third down. You get a first down on second down and you’re activating a guy that is a matchup problem. What that allowed us to do is be aggressive in that next set of downs. I think that is something that you have to do; you have to have that balance, stay aggressive. A lot of the time in those four-minute drives, if you’re just trying to play it conservatively — if you’re just allowing this defense to tee off on you, where you run and it’s a third-down pass, the crowd is in it, you can’t hear anything — that’s when those drives go sideways. We wanted to stay aggressive and have that balance. I thought that we did that. In the passing game, we were able to hit some key plays there. We converted the third down, which we went on a quick-cadence to [WR] Keenan [Allen] on the curl route, which I thought was critical — it was loud. Don’t truly allow that crowd to get in the game. That’s what happened in Washington, too. We had four third-down conversions on that drive. A couple of those were tempo’d into third down and we were able to keep the defense from getting set and really engineering their plan for that down-and-distance. Then, in those got-to-have-it situations, we converted two fourth downs and then we split them on a run. Those ‘GTHI’ situations, do you have your best stuff? I felt like, in those two games, we certainly did. I think that the Kansas City game fits that description, too. That was kind of a close-out game, too — it wasn’t quite two-minute, but in terms of closing the game out, that’s what we have to continue to do offensively; play as a team. Both of those drives in the Washington game were reflective of a team offensive performance. It wasn’t just [QB] Justin [Herbert] putting us on his back. It wasn’t just [WR] Mike [Williams] or Keenan making some freak catch out there. It was everybody touching the ball and everybody doing their part. You can’t say enough about our offensive line in both of those games. If you go back to the Washington game, that was the feared front coming off of the number two defense in the NFL. We played well against those guys. That’s what happened last week, our O-line came ready to play.”

On when the idea came about of Murray potentially rushing off of the edge:

“Since we got here. He kind of fits that hybrid model of player. He’s a little bit like a [Patriots LB] Dont’a Hightower, that style of linebacker, where he’s a little bit of this, a little bit of that — he has that body type. There’s kind of a progression of doing that. When you’re playing two different positions, that can be a lot for you. So, you have to do that in a sequence where the player is ready for that. I think that there has been enough time elapsed where you can feel like you’re good with that because he has a good enough foundation in your system. I think that that was always the vision for us with him, to get him doing a lot of different jobs for us, because he is capable of that; him attacking the quarterback, attacking the line of scrimmage, but also being an asset as an inside linebacker where he is sweeping, playing behind of the ball and running things down, and playing in coverage, too. That’s part of the beauty of coaching; figuring it out for your players. Sometimes it takes some time. We’re just always after it. As coaches — me, [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo [Hill], [Linebackers Coach] Michael Wilhoite, [Alex G. Spanos Coaching Fellow] John Timu — all of us that are coaching him are finding that sweet spot. Sometimes it takes some time. He’s been patient with us. I hated to lose him for that amount of time because he could have definitely helped us out there, but I think that he is ready to come back and show us his best stuff. I’m really excited to get him back out there.”

On the Vikings' receiving corps:

"They're really good. From a tandem standpoint, [Cowboys WRs Amari] Cooper and CeeDee Lamb, those guys really stood out to me when we played them, and these two guys are of that caliber. These guys are true route-runners. These guys are technicians. These guys can really, really separate and they can move around within the formation. I've gone against [Vikings WR] Adam [Thielen] a long time. This guy has a great NFL story — from Minnesota State, Mankato, which is Division II, and now he is one of the top wideouts in the league. When I was in Chicago, with him and [former Vikings WR and current Bills WR] Stefon Diggs, it's like, 'Man, here we go.' These guys are really, really good. He's been doing it for a long time. He's still doing it really at a high level. Now, he has taken this young guy under his wing. [Vikings WR] Justin [Jefferson] is an outstanding player. They can move wherever in the formation. They can run any route. That's the thing about both of these guys, they are legit inside-outside route tree guys. And, they both can run — they are both 4.4 [40-yard-dash]. They're a very difficult tandem to deal with and their passing game is reflective of that."

On where the Vikings have improved since the start of the season:

"Offensively, what they've done a good job of, because they've had some injuries — [TE] Irv Smith [Jr.] is a heck of a player, I have a lot of respect for his game — they've kind of figured it out at tight end in how they want to play. What they've done is they've really been able to feature those two backs. I think that [Vikings RB Alexander] Mattison is a heck of a player. I had him when I was in the division, and then, when I was in Denver, we played him. This guy is fantastic. [Vikings RB] Dalvin [Cook] is such an amazing runner. He's a dual-threat guy. To be able to pair those two with these two wideouts, and then, they've kind of figured out those third and fourth wideouts as they've gone, when they're playing three receivers, they've just really developed an identity of how they want to play the game. I think that has established itself so far. They're a very difficult cover. Then, they've been able to get their first-round pick back on the O-line — since [T Christian Darrisaw] has been active, it's been a lot better for them, too, because they have a quality left tackle now. Just a very, very good offense overall."

On the 'hallmarks' of a defense run by Vikings Head Coach Mike Zimmer:

"Really physical. Very, very physical. They don't give up very many big plays because they're extremely sound. If it's a passing game, he's one of the top third-down architects in the history of the game. When it's known pass, this guy is as good of a defensive coach as there has ever been. That's the truth. Wherever he's been, whether it's Minnesota, Cincinnati — you can go back a long way; this guy has stood the test of time. They're outstanding with their disguise plan, the variety of their pressure packages, the variety of rushers. He's a secondary coach. You can see it by the way that they play against the pass. They always have been. This guy is as good as it gets as a defensive coach in the league."

On Vikings RB Dalvin Cook:

"He can see and he can get to top speed really quickly. His top speed is faster than yours most of the time. If you look at the data from Florida State, he has more 60-yard runs in NCAA history. This guy has real gas. He's not a build-speed runner, this guy can get to top speed fast. Most of the time when you're planning as a guy that has that type of juice, you're saying, 'OK, well, what's his vision like? What's his pace like? Is he in a hurry? Is he one of those guys that just feels fast and doesn't have the pace?' This guy has real pace as a runner. He has pace. He has vision. When he sees it, he's gone. You can see it on film. You're just holding your breath sometimes like, 'Oh boy, there he goes.' He's a big-time factor in the screen game, in the receiving game. He's a complete runner that way. He's as good as there is in the league."

On if Cook is 'one of the most dangerous running backs in the screen game because he can quickly get up to speed':

"Yes. The big thing about the screen game, too, is setting up your blocks, allowing your linemen to get to where their landmarks and their assignments are, and then hitting it. It's kind of like a zone play, in a way, that way. You guys can look this up, when we played him in 2019, there was a crazy stat, analytics-wise, his screen production was incredible at that time. He was leading the NFL by like 1,000 miles. It makes him even that more dangerous because he doesn't have to carry it to hurt you. It's a very inexpensive play for an offense. There's not a lot of risk involved on the screen and it can go a long way. Just a very dangerous player."

On if DL Linval Joseph is ‘underrated’:

“I don’t know how he could possibly be underrated for those who watch the NFL. You guys are all watching the same film I am. He’s 34 years old and he has the highest miles per hour of any D-linemen in the game on Sunday — over 16 miles per hour in the game, and he can run faster than that. Against Philly a couple of years back, I think that he hit 19 [miles per hour] on that return that he had against them when he was with Minnesota. He’s just a pro’s pro. He’s a force of nature. There aren’t many men constructed like him. What makes him a true force of nature is his spirit. That competitive spirit that he has, he really loves the game. He loves to play. He loves to work. He was on the elliptical grinding miles on Monday, sweating in a sweat jacket and making us all look just so mortal. You can’t, as a coach, ever take it for granted. I know that I don’t. I tell the guys all of the time, ‘You’re witnessing something special.’ As long as you guys play, as long as we coach, you’re going to be pointing out this example of a guy that does it the right way. He’s been a real pleasure to coach. He’s played for [Vikings Head Coach] Mike Zimmer and [former Giants Head Coach] Tom Caughlin, two really special head coaches. To join up with guys like that, you have to gain their full respect. I know that was a big goal of mine because I’ve had so much respect for him from afar. When I was in the division with him in Chicago, this guy was as good of an interior player as there is. He’s still playing like that. I’m just really proud to coach him. He’s been an anchor for those young guys — not that [DL] Justin [Jones] or Jerry [Tillery] are young players, those guys are in their third or fourth year. He sets an incredible example for all of us.”

On which play he ‘hit 16 miles per hour on’ in the game against the Eagles:

“I don’t know that. That report gives you everybody in the game, Philly and the Chargers, and he was the top speed in the game, out of the D-linemen.”

On if he’s surprised by Joseph’s speed:

“Not really because he’s usually like that. He loves to practice. I’m trying to make sure the guy is engineered for Sunday, because he has acquired a lot of mileage over the course of however many years. But he just loves to go out there. He’s got a big engine; he’s not one of these big guys that gets tired, and you see them run off and you don’t see them for a while. He runs off and then he comes back on, quickly. He’s having a heck of a year rushing the passer. We felt like he would the way we play; that’s been another part of his game as well.”

On LB Cole Christiansen:

“I love coaching that guy. Cole has been such a breath of fresh air for me, every single day, because of the way he works, the way he competes. He’s been active for the Baltimore game and has been really active on teams. He’s a guy that we have full confidence in. He had a really quality preseason for us. This guy is made up of all the right stuff, beyond just going to West Point and knowing what that place requires of you. We all know you have to be a special something to graduate from West Point and play football there at the same time. Just as an NFL football player, he’s just so professional in everything that he does. He sets a high example of what it means to be a Charger, and we’re really happy to have him. I know he’s improving, and he is a guy that, when you’re trying to build something, he’s the guy you want to join up with.”

On his time coaching at Hutchinson Community College (Kan.):

“It’s one of the informative experiences of my career. I was 26 going out there in the middle of Kansas — that’s where Hutchinson is. I learned a lot about myself. I was a first time defensive coordinator. When I talk about becoming a complete coach, that’s as impactful of a coaching stop as I had. You’re coaching all freshman and sophomores, so they’re young guys. They come from really tough backgrounds, from all over the country. The roster is like an NFL roster, 53 players, and you have ten out-of-state players with 43 Kansas players. You’re bringing these different people together and you’re managing it, and you have one month in the summer before training camp. One month, and then they’re out there playing games. You really learn how to connect with people, relationships, how to teach and give these guys a plan to be successful because they’re out of there right away and then going to school. It’s a big transition for them because they’re far away from home and it doesn’t look anything like their home. I was around a lot of really special guys that are the reason why I’m here today. A lot of people know [Falcons WR] Cordarrelle Patterson, [Cardinals OLB] Markus Golden, [Packers LB] De’Vondre Campbell, some of those guys. Then, there are other guys that you don’t know about. It was a really special experience for me. I know I grew a lot in those two years. We were really good. I still keep in touch with all those guys. It’s been fun to see them live their dreams. It wasn’t just those guys in the NFL, we had a lot of guys go play college football, make it, graduate college and do something that no one in their family had done. I never would’ve been as good of a coach without that experience. I look back on that with a lot of fond memories.”

On improvements in the run defense:

“The number one thing we need to address is trying to get more negative plays, seeking out the negative plays on first or second down. They can give us more opportunities to rush the passer. I think that you can do that in a couple different ways. But just being aggressive on early downs, to get negative plays. I think that we’re really learning a lot about our run-front in terms of what fits them best. I think the last two weeks we really settled in to how we want to play. I think, up front, we’re really getting into a comfort zone, our second and third level into a comfort zone. Now, it’s just taking that growth and improvement to the game and being even more aggressive on first and second down to get those negative plays. I think that’s really what’s missing right now, we haven’t really had very many of them. Those usually come when you are in that comfort zone of understanding our formations, our technique, and then getting the right guys in the right positions, which I think we have now. Once we get those, then you are going to see even an even bigger improvement in our overall defense. I’ve been very pleased with how we’ve played the run the last two weeks against two quality running teams. I’m really proud of the guys because they’ve worked really hard. In the Philly game, you take those loose plays from the quarterback, and it’s a different movie. We need to do a better job on the loose plays. But, in terms of the actual run-front defense, we’ve made big strides the last two weeks.”

On DL Justin Jones:

“What J.J. brings is versatility in the run defense and the pass rush front because he can move around. He gives you a little more penetration because he’s got really quickness. I think that he’s a hard guy to deal with. If you look at the goal line when they were backed up on that second down, he can split you because of his get-off. He’s got real get-off inside. Then, in pass rush, he’s the guy that can really set things up for you, because he’s got real feel in there from a one-on-one standpoint. Then, when you’re running picks in games, he has a really good feel on how to engineer that. He has a motor. The thing about J.J. that he really brings to the group is a motor to the D-line. When he’s out there, it just helps everyone else because of his spirit and how he plays the game. I think that since he’s come back, these last two ball games, you’ve seen our front play better. It’s just that competitive spirit that he has. He’s a multiplier.”

RUNNING BACK AUSTIN EKELER**On his last run against the Eagles:**

“It was a great feeling. It was a great operation, too. It was good to see that we were going to end up with the ball to end the game. That’s one of [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley’s points that he tries to emphasize; we want to be in control at the end of the game to be able to eat a little more clock, get closer and be able to spike it with some time left to kick a field goal. That was definitely a great feeling.”

On ‘feeling the momentum down the stretch’ last week:

“We were connecting throughout the entire game. I felt like we had a lot of momentum during the game because we were being consistent, we were making plays, moving the chains. We all know [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley is going for it on fourth down. Whether you agree with it or not, he’s doing it. I thought it was great. This morning, he said, ‘People that’re down there and don’t go for it are scared to death. They’re scared. What if we don’t get it?’ He’s trying to play it so he can have the ball at the end and end the game with it. I love it. We’re about it. Let’s do it. I felt like we were clicking. We practiced well and it translated to the game. That’s what we have to do this week.”

On the team ‘firing on all cylinders’ against the Eagles:

“I think we’ve shown that level of play before in the beginning of the season. I think we got away from it because of our consistency. Even at the beginning of the season I think we only had, like, two punts in the first three or four games. It felt good to get our rhythm back, whatever we did this week — which I already know what we did, as far as practice — going into it. Everyone was making sure of consistency, efficiency at the ball, operation. It’ll be the same thing this week and today because that’s where it starts; how consistent we were in practice, as far as catching balls, making that tackle. It all translates to the game. I’m looking forward to doing that again. I feel like we can play at that level, but it starts during the week.”

On the run game:

“With the run game, you never know what kind of day it’s going to be. You always have some optimism thinking you have a good plan going into it, but when reality strikes, sometimes it’s, ‘Hey, this is going to be a three four-yard ground per play run.’ That’s what it was. It was a game where it’s like, ‘Hey, we’re going to be pounding the ball, and if it’s not working, J-Herb [QB Justin Herbert] is going to be whipping it over the top.’ And that’s what was working for us that game. I’m glad we didn’t come away from the run, especially on that last drive. We obviously wanted to keep the clock running, maybe them playing a little more aggressive, trying to back us up ended opening some creases, which allowed us to run the ball a bit more effectively on the last drive.”

On the Vikings’ defense:

“[Vikings Head Coach Mike] Zimmer’s defense has always been pretty stout. Just from his looks, his knowledge of the game, you see it trickle across the entire league as far as people taking things from him. It’s a challenge for us. They’re a great team, I don’t think their record reflects how good of a team they really are. We have to respect that going into this game, like we do every single week. We have a plan for it because we have a feeling of what we know is coming. It’s going to come down to Sunday. Sunday is wild especially this year. I don’t know if it’s just this year in particular, but I feel like you have to show off. We’re seeing teams and say, ‘Oh, they’re probably going to beat this team.’ Then, nope — they end up losing or it’s a really close game. That’s what I love about this game. It’s just so competitive. I’m looking forward to competing. We have a plan. How it goes, we’ll see.”

DEFENSIVE LINE JUSTIN JONES**On returning from injury:**

“It’s pretty good. For the Patriots game, I felt like I wasn’t really tired. My calf was a little fatigued, but it wasn’t too crazy, just the adjustment. I’ve been working really hard to get back. I’ve been watching my teammates and they’ve really been motivating me to strain to get back and make sure I’m ready to go. It wasn’t that big of an adjustment.”

On DL Linval Joseph:

“He’s a beast. He’s a mountain of a man, just a spectacle. He’s a great guy with a great personality, a funny guy. He’s freakishly strong and freakishly fast, and he’s just great to be around, great to play with. I’m blessed to even have the opportunity to play next to him. I’ve been blessed to play with guys like that, starting with [former Chargers DT] Brandon Mebane and now Linval Joseph. It’s great.”

On if Joseph is perceived as ‘underrated’:

“He’s very underrated. For somebody who’s up there in there years where Linval is, he’s still getting the top speed in practice. He’s still getting the top speed in the game. He’s still making all these tackles. He’s still playing like he’s in year four or year five. There’s no slack to the game. He gets better each year. He gets better with age.”

On Joseph’s ‘dedication to the game’:

“Being his teammate, I get to see the work he puts in during the week; the extra conditioning, the extra layers in practice to make sure you make the weight you’re able to play and be as good as you are. At that weight, it takes a lot for somebody like that to get that done. He works at it, and he has a routine. He sticks to it, and he’s really showing up and out with it.”

On his pregame routine:

“When I came in, I had a lot of vets in my room. A lot of vets; so, I learned from every single one of them. From year-three [OLB] Joey [Bosa] to year-13 [Brandon] Mebane, I learned it from everybody. Seeing a guy like that, seeing his routine — how he does stuff and how he goes about his day — I get it. What I see, at the end of the day, just makes me want to make sure I’m on my Ps and Q’s. Because of a guy like that who’s working really hard to make sure he’s on the field, I have to make sure that I’m able to be on the field, too. I have to make sure I’m on my stuff, too. I don’t want to let him down, the same way I don’t want to let anyone else down.”

On his and Joseph's relationship:

"L.J. came to me and said, 'Hey, do what you have to do. I'm here for you.' That's all I had to hear and I'm out of there. I'm jumping snaps, I'm getting off the ball. L.J. is there to make the plays. That's such a comforting feeling for a guy like me who just likes to penetrate and cause disruption. I know somebody has my back, so I don't feel like a lone ranger out there trying to make plays by myself. I'm really just out there trying to make plays with the team. It's really a comforting feeling."

On the Vikings' offense:

"Every game has a life of its own. That's one thing [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley said, 'You have to play the game the way it needs to be played.' Whether that's keeping the quarterback in the pocket, whether that's letting quarterbacks roll out of the pocket, whether it's making negative plays or sending a bunch of pressure, staying in base play and making base adjustments, We have to play the game how it has to be played. For a team like that, we really just need to make sure we're penetrating and we're making the running backs slow down and stop their feet, having to redirect. Once we do that, our defense is so fast that I think we'll make a lot of negative plays."