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## Chargers Week 15 Media Availability

Monday, December 11, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On an update regarding QB Justin Herbert:**

"He is going to see a couple of hand specialists today, one this morning and one this afternoon, and then we'll know more from there."

#### **On Herbert's 'status moving forward':**

"No status moving forward. He is going to see those two specialists today. I think that there was one this morning, like at 8 [a.m.], and then I think that he is going to see another one this afternoon."

#### **On 'when' he will 'know' Herbert's status for Thursday night's game:**

"I don't know that. We're just going to get the information from these specialists and then go from there."

#### **On 'further testing':**

"It's going to happen more with the specialists."

#### **On if it is 'impossible to play with an injury to the index finger of a throwing hand':**

"I don't know that. There's a lot of information that we're gathering right now. He is tough as they come, but we're going to make sure that, whatever it is, we're going to do what is best for Justin [Herbert], long-term."

#### **On if there is a 'possibility' that Herbert could play on Thursday night:**

"I don't know that. We're going to wait and see what happens today and we'll go from there."

#### **On if he, personally, 'ever tried to play with' an injury similar to Herbert's:**

"I was fortunate, I didn't have anything happen to my hand."

#### **On an update regarding G Zion Johnson:**

"He finished the game, but no update on him. Tough customer. He played very well in the game."

#### **On 'additional updates to report':**

"Nothing to report for Thursday, as of right now. We'll know more here in the next 24 hours for practice tomorrow."

**On QB Easton Stick's performance:**

"I thought that he moved the team [down the field]. I know that the production wasn't there, from the scoreboard perspective, but I think that he made some really strong throws. I thought that he was strong with the ball. After he got the first half behind him, I thought that, in the second half, he moved the team, made some plays with his legs. That series where he hit Q [WR Quentin Johnston] on the deep one, and then followed it up with the big 'in' route, then had a good scramble that caused the penalty down in the red zone. I thought that he did some good things that we can definitely build off of. I told him this last night, when he went into the game, our team believed that he would move the team. I think that our team has been watching him now for three years — some of them for longer, he's been here since 2019. They believe in Easton [Stick]. They know what he can do. I did think, in the second half, he did some things that we definitely need to build off of for this Thursday night."

**On where he has 'seen the most growth' in Stick:**

"In all ways as a quarterback. Mechanically, throwing the football with accuracy, I think that he has really developed that sense of, 'Hey, this is what my base needs to be, this is where my shoulders need to be.' Consistency with his stroke. I think that you saw that last night. I thought that you saw him really drive the football — throw it with touch, really drive it on some of those in-breaks. There was a tight third-down throw to [WR] Keenan [Allen] in a bunch of traffic that I thought was really good. That fourth down to Keenan on the choice [route], he really ripped that, gave him a chance. I think that he has really improved mechanically. Then, he's really sharp. He studies, he's a gym rat, and he gives you that dimension with his legs. That's important with your backup quarterback, that you have that element of mobility, because you know that teams are probably going to pressure and stuff like that. To have a guy that is smart and that can move, it gives you a chance. As I mentioned, I think that he can learn a lot from that tape and give our team confidence going into Thursday."

**On if he has had 'conversations' with ownership regarding his future:**

"No."

**On the outlook for the remainder of the season:**

"I'm just focused on Thursday."

**On 'how much of the gameplan changes' if Stick is the quarterback:**

"I think the good thing is that Justin [Herbert] has a lot of mobility, too. Justin is a very good athlete, so I don't think it needs to change too much. There are going to be some things in the passing game that could change, based on Justin and Easton [Stick], and that's just natural. Your quarterbacks aren't going to be exactly the same. I think the fact that we do have that dimension with his legs does give us that dual threat in the plan. We think that's important, just in general, but with him, maybe you can activate that even more."

**On the message to the team today:**

"The message after the game, what I told them. I haven't had a chance to meet with them yet because today is just a recovery day for them, an off day. What I told them after the game was that this is the tough side of the league. Sometimes, in the NFL, you're going to have seasons like this, where a lot happens, like it has happened to us. You need to face it, as a team, and you need to continue to make adjustments. Justin went out and we needed to make adjustments, we needed to go give ourselves a chance to compete. I thought that when we scored there, we at least gave ourselves a chance to come back. We're going to have to, in a short time, put a really good plan together for Las Vegas. That's our job, to make sure that we go into Las Vegas with a chance to compete. That's the short-term. We can't really worry about what happened three, four, five, six games ago. That's not where we need to go right now. We need to go to Las Vegas, we need to put a great game plan together and give ourselves a chance. That's the NFL. You have to go give yourself a chance in the plan. That's been the message since Day 1, but when you go through a tough time like this, you have to focus even more because when you lose your starting quarterback, you're going to have to make adjustments. You lose some star players, like we've had throughout the years, you have to make adjustments. That's where our focus is, on making the adjustments Thursday."

**On if there is 'any chance' that WR Joshua Palmer returns this week:**

"To be determined. He was able to get on a practice field last week, which was a good sign. Again, we're going to make sure that we do what's best for him, but he has been progressing on the practice field."

**On 'how much' the organization 'has to factor' Herbert's 'future':**

"100 percent. All of our focus has to be on his future. There's nothing more important than that, than his right hand and his long-term future. He's 25 years old. Has a really, really bright future in front of him. Every decision that we make is going to be with that in mind."

**On pass protection and 'what has caused problems against the blitz':**

"I think it's a combination of things. After watching the tape, all of the factors that I mentioned, I think that's all true. I think the film bears it out. But, I think a big element, too, is that in the NFL, when it's known-pass, there's going to be pressure. When there's the designer aspect of the NFL, and you have good personnel on the other side, there's going to be pressure. We've done a good job of handling the pressure because Justin [Herbert] plays at a really high level under pressure — he always has, he always will. I think when you lose some receivers, that makes it even tougher. I think we've been able to really attack the pressure, when we've been at full strength at wide out. I think you've seen us have really prolific years, or prolific games, when we're at full strength. But I really think the other part of it is just the run game. The more times you face pressure in the NFL, or known-pass, where you get into the designer element of the NFL, the more it's going to be difficult to consistently execute. That's where the marriage of the run and the pass and getting the run game going, I thought that we did some good things yesterday in the run game, some better things — not good enough — but that will solve a lot of problems for your protection plan. You can have great protection plans, but there's going to be tough matchups — not only in the pressure, but then there are tough matchups that you have to beat. The more you're facing those types of situations, the more things can go wrong. We need to continue to do a better job of staying balanced, limiting those opportunities for people to attack us."

**On the transition of responsibility from C Corey Linsley to C Will Clapp and Herbert's involvement:**

"It's the same. Will [Clapp] is as sharp as they come, and that is the truth. If you ask any of our coaches, our players, Will is as sharp as they come and as quality of a backup center as I've been around in the NFL. We're very happy with him and how he has played. Not easy replacing an All-Pro, Corey [Linsley] is an All-Pro player, but Will has been an asset for us this year."

**On WR Keenan Allen setting the franchise's single-season receptions record with four games remaining:**

"In another big-time matchup against [Broncos CB Patrick] Surtain [II], when you watch the tape, he is still winning — I mean winning — against the elite players in the league. A cornerback I really respect to [Cowboys CB] Stephon Gilmore from Dallas, and Stephon is still playing at an elite level. I think that when you watch Keenan [Allen] and Stephon in that matchup, Keenan [Allen] is still separating as well as he ever has. He has given us a chance every Sunday to compete, to play good offense. He's having a career year. I don't see him slowing down anytime soon. Even when Easton [Stick] went in the game yesterday, you were still seeing the production from him, you were still seeing the separation. Easton was able to locate him. That's what we're going to need moving forward, is Keenan continuing to be who he is, and then playing to good around him. Hopefully, get Josh [Palmer] back here, whenever that time comes. Q [Johnston] had a good game yesterday. We just continue to keep adding around him and you're going to see even better."

**On if having Allen available 'is important' for Stick:**

"Definitely. Especially in the middle of the field, or in those third downs where the coverage is tight, you need to know where you can go and trust with the ball. I thought you saw Easton [Stick] do that a couple of times. He had the fourth-down conversion, then he had the one over the middle, which was a tight window throw, kind of to our left, to Keenan [Allen]. That's what he provides, he provides that middle of the field target, or, 'Hey, if he's playing outside, I can trust it. A 50/50 ball, I can give it to him.'"

**On if he 'feels any more towards' OLB Khalil Mack and Allen due to 'how much time they have going forward':**

"You have no idea how much we're trying to win for them. Keenan [Allen], I just have so much respect from afar, but when I came here, as a young guy, how much he helped us implement and install a culture. When you team up with these star players who have been through a lot, they help you a ton in getting your message across. You have to work through them to do it. I think what we've been able to do with guys like that is, number one, we've been able to feature them, and they've had really good years for us, but for those guys, they've achieved a lot from a personal standpoint, winning is what matters the most to those guys. That's all they're about. Going back to 2018 with Khalil [Mack], when he was 27 [years old], that was all that he was about, was winning. I think when he got to Chicago, he totally changed everything there, in terms of the standard and the culture. He's done the same thing here. When you've accomplished that personal stuff, and you've been [Defensive] Player of the Year and you've been All-Pro, reaching all of these milestones, what you really want, at the end of the day, is to compete for a championship. When I wake up, that's what I'm trying to do for these guys because they're giving us so much. We're going to keep working at it until we get there."

**On 'the opportunities not coming around often to compete for a Super Bowl' and the impact that has on players:**

"You'd have to ask our guys that. I'm not going to speak for the team. Every move that we've made, since we've been here, has been to try to join up with people that have those experiences, that have accomplished the most in the NFL, where you feel like they're going to give you what you're missing, or they're going to have that have the example for people who maybe haven't seen it. I think that all of our moves with free agents, trades, it's been with that in mind, to try to teach these guys that this is what a winner looks like, this is what a championship looks like, this is what an All-Pro looks like. But, it's a process. I think that's what's frustrating sometimes about competition, sometimes it just doesn't happen exactly when you want it to. This has been a tough year for us because we've been right there. All we can continue to do is keep bringing in guys like Khalil Mack, that perform like Khalil Mack, and good things will follow."

**On the performance of the defense yesterday:**

"Like I said after the game, played really tough. I thought that we played really, really tough. We're improving. Missed a couple of tackles there, three or four routine tackles, or else, I think, it would have been an elite performance. I thought that the plan was good enough. I thought that our guys played physical, tough. But, we needed to go play lights out yesterday. It wasn't that level of a performance."

**On if the team's record will 'impact' whether Palmer returns:**

"I don't know that. If Josh [Palmer] is ready to play, he'll be out there. But, we're going to make sure that we're going to do what's best for Josh."

**On if QB Max Duggan will be the backup quarterback if Stick starts:**

"On that type of timeline, yes."

**On an update regarding DB Deane Leonard:**

"I don't have a timetable on that, but we'll make sure that you're updated. I don't think that he will be ready for Thursday."

## **SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.**

### **On if he has watched the film yet and his evaluation of the defense's performance:**

"Yeah, I watched a little bit of it. We could have been better in some spots. Overall, we got some stops, but we could have been better in some spots. We put some good stuff on tape, too."

### **On areas of improvement:**

"Tackling. The third downs, it came down to just tackling. It was one-on-one, we need to make the tackle, including me. I had the first one, I think K9 [LB Kenneth Murray Jr.] or someone had the next one. We just have to tackle, get off the field and give [QB] Easton [Stick] and the guys a chance to make the next play."

### **On the Broncos' final touchdown, a play-action pass:**

"Good design by them. We could have been better, also, but good play design."

### **On the defense's performance against the run:**

"I feel like we were good in some spots. We gave up a few explosive runs, but, overall, it was good in some spots."

### **On the 'vibe around the team right now':**

"Short week, we have a quick turnaround. We have a divisional game coming up on Thursday. We just have to get our bodies right and our minds ready to go because we have a big game coming up. We have to get ready."

### **On if this is 'one of the toughest stretches of his career':**

"Definitely. But, I'm going to keep fighting and we're going to finish until the end."

### **On 'having a good defense' and 'missing the opportunity this season':**

"Overall, I don't think it's just a good defense, I feel like we have a great team — special teams, one of the top units on offense. We just haven't been connected all year long. We've been disconnected in some spots — offense will play good, defense will play good, then it will be in reverse order. Until we're able to play complementary football, all at one time, we won't get the results that we want."

### **On 'if something is slipping away right now':**

"Definitely because the guys we have in our locker room, we know how hard we're working and we know how much we put into it, so definitely."

### **On 'why the team has been disconnected':**

"I think that it takes everybody locking in on the plan, and not only doing it every day in practice, but executing when it comes to the game. Getting out there, no matter what they're presenting to us — the team, our opponent — it's going out there and executing the way we know how to execute. We've been able to do that in some spots as a defense and some spots as an offense, but we haven't had that consistency of doing it for four quarters and for the whole entire season."

### **On 'if the disconnect is frustrating':**

"Yeah, it's definitely frustrating. Like you said, you work your butt off all week to try to get that fixed and figure out what's the reason. I'm going to keep working and I'm pretty sure that every guy in that locker room is going to do the same. We're going to try and get it fixed."

### **On his level of confidence in QB Easton Stick:**

"I have all the confidence in the world. He gives us a great look every week. When he got in the game, you've seen the throws that he was able to make, some of the plays he was able to make. I have all of the confidence in him. We're going to be behind him and have his back, as a defense."

**On if Sunday was a 'low point' this season:**

"I hate losing, so every loss for me feels like shit, so it just feels bad."

**On his focus for the remainder of the season and coaching:**

"My job is to focus on my day-to-day and get better every day. That stuff will get handled at the end of the season. That's none of my business. I try to leave upstairs business alone. I'm just worried about what I have to do on the field and how can I get my team better and how can I be better to win for us."

**On preparing for the Raiders, who just lost 3-0:**

"We were just in a game that was 6-0. It's the NFL. They were in a tough game. They are in a short week, just like us, and we're a division opponent of theirs, so I'm pretty sure that they're going to be ready, just like we are."

**On if fellow teammates are 'talking about the playoffs':**

"For sure, definitely. Guys want to win. The guys know what is in front of us, the AFC can shake out any way. We just need to win the next game in front of us and look up in the end."

**On Raiders QB Aidan O'Connell and the first game against him:**

"I feel like he's done a great job for his team. We were able to get the ball on defense. He's still young, still learning. I'm pretty sure that he is going to develop more."

## **DEFENSIVE LINEMAN SEBASTIAN JOSEPH-DAY**

### **On the loss to Denver:**

"It hurt. That one hurt, for sure. I felt like, from a defensive perspective, that we did a lot of good things, but when we needed to have it towards the end — that last drive, we had a little miscommunication, missed tackles. We had them on third down like three times, I believe. Didn't get off the field. When you don't get that done versus a quarterback like [Broncos QB] Russell Wilson, he's going to make you pay. Overall, I felt like for the defense it was a solid performance. Was it great? No. There's definitely some things we could clean up. I just take accountability for myself. We each have to take accountability for this whole season. We haven't done the things that we needed to do in all three phases to get the job done. We have to look at ourselves in the mirror and be real with ourselves, learn from this thing and try to go 1-0 this week versus the Raiders."

### **On 'looking yourself in the mirror':**

"I just think it's everyone taking pride in their role and making sure they're doing their one-eleventh. Not going outside the boxes, doing their job down-in and down-out. Making the routine plays. Again, I felt like the lowest part, yesterday — for the defense we did that, but, like I said, when we needed to have it, there were just little mix-ups here and there that kind of cost us that. Offense went down, scored on a huge drive. We get the ball back and boom, it was kind of going. [QB] Easton [Stick] was playing really well and getting in a groove. It definitely would have helped, for sure, but we couldn't get that done. It's definitely on us. As a defense, we have to be accountable for our part and what we could have done. We could have gotten that stop when the ball got turned over in the red zone. Miscommunication on that, as well. Missed tackles. Things like that. We spotted them 14 points. If they don't score, they don't win. It's a team sport. We have to be better on defense, for sure."

### **On the touchdown to Broncos WR Courtland Sutton:**

"It was interesting, for sure. He [Broncos QB Russell Wilson] did have a lot of time back there. I don't really want to talk about scheme here. I don't want to talk about what I think, but all I know is I had to contain the quarterback. I had to contain him and keep him inside the pocket. That was my job, I did that. I went back inside and tried to make a play, but he threw it. I couldn't really say anything scheme-wise. That's more a coach question."

### **On QB Easton Stick:**

"I have nothing but full confidence in Easton Stick. The looks that he gives us week-in and week-out are amazing. He's confident. He's poised. He knows the offense like the back of his hand. He's honestly a great, great quarterback. I believe that he actually proved that with the situation that he was put in. A lot of quarterbacks put in that situation, they probably wouldn't get you points. The man drove — he got warmed up and he drove down the field in, what, two strikes? Touchdown. You know? Versus a defense that was playing very well. A defense that was sending a lot of zero blitzes, doing a lot of different things to try and get the quarterback off track. A lot of things to mess up the offense. I think he did a really good job. I think he was really poised in there. He did what he had to do with what he was given. We have full confidence in Easton. I think he proved that yesterday with the situation that he was in, for sure."

### **On the touchdown to Sutton:**

"I didn't say that at all. I just said within my job of the defense, I had to contain. You know what front we play, right? I'm not throwing any shade at anyone at all. We play a five-down [linemen] front. Sometimes, it requires some of us to contain, so I had to contain on that play. That means if I'm containing, someone isn't there [bringing pressure]. That's all I'm saying. I'm not throwing any shade at anyone. I had to contain. I had to keep [Broncos QB] Russell [Wilson] in the pocket, which I did."

**On conveying taking advantage of opportunities to young players:**

"I think [OLB] Khalil [Mack] hit it right on the head. It's tough. I opened up the press conference saying it's a tough one because opportunities like this don't come often. I've been fortunate enough in my career to be part of those type of opportunities, in my six-year career. I think Khalil does such a wonderful job of trying to relay it. Khalil isn't a very vocal guy. He tries to lead by his action. I feel Khalil does that day-in and day-out with his actions to show people how important it is. A lot of older guys try to do that, as well. I think it just comes with experience, too, for those young guys. Just being around and realizing how special the group of people that we have in that situation is. I don't like going back and talking about my experiences, but in my previous experiences and previous employment has been very veteran-led. A veteran-led crew. The young guys were able to come together and understand what the opportunity was. The opportunity presents itself in those big-time games and what we're fighting for. Not saying that the guys don't understand. They do understand. That's why I think we played solid yesterday. It's just being accountable and holding ourselves to the standard to be able to close out those games. Bending but not breaking. Yesterday, we broke. We broke at the end. That's it, plain and simple. We just have to be better. There's no magical words that I can say up here. We have to be better, plain and simple. All of us, that's it."

**On his mindset:**

"Mentally, I'm just trying to win. I'm trying to win, man. I'm trying to beat the Raiders. That's where I am. Obviously, it's not where we want to be, but it doesn't mean that I'm going to let where we are right now dictate my mindset and where I know this team can go, and the future of this team. I'm going to put in the same effort that I put in Week 1. Trying to go 1-0 versus the Raiders, plain and simple. That's my mindset."

**On his focus for the remainder of the season and coaching:**

"I honestly don't know how to answer that question. Obviously, I have nothing but love for [Head Coach] Brandon Staley. He's helped me so much in my career. I know the type of man he is. I know the type of coach he is. I know how detailed he is. I know how hard he works. I know how much time he puts in. I think it's easy when you're on the outside to see the result and be like, 'This guy isn't doing it. This guy isn't getting it done.' I just feel like what people doesn't understand is what goes on in the locker room or what goes on in these buildings. I feel like it's a lot more than what people think. If people could be there and be a fly on the wall, maybe they'd understand a lot better that it's not all on Coach Staley. Obviously, he's the Head Coach, so he's going to get the brunt of whatever the result is. Like I said — I came up here and what did I say? I said we have to be better. As a team. That's not scheme. He's given us the blueprint. We have to go out and execute. I think sometimes it's definitely not what it seems on the outside. That's all I have to say about that."