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Chargers Week 17 Media Availability

Friday, December 31, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On if S Derwin James Jr. will start on Sunday:

“Yes.”

On if James Jr. will be ‘on a snap count’:

“He will not.”

On if LB Kenneth Murray Jr. would return to inside linebacker if LB Drue Tranquill does not play on Sunday:

“If he clears [COVID-19] protocols, there could be that possibility. If not, then we’ll play [LBs] Amen [Ogbongbemiga] and Nick [Niemann].”

On if he would prefer Murray Jr. to play exclusively at one position on Sunday, if able to play:

“If he’s able to play in this game, he will be full-time inside linebacker — if he is able to clear protocols.”

On who would start at RT if T Storm Norton and T Trey Pipkins III are not available for the game:

“The options would be [G/T] Brendan [Jaimes] and [G] Matt Feiler. We’re still working through those contingencies right now. We’ve prepared for both. We’re still going to decide that within the next 48 hours.”

On who would play LG if Feiler moves to RT:

“Brenden [Jaimes] would go to left guard. If Brendan were to go to right tackle, then Matt [Feiler] would stay at left guard.”

On S Derwin James Jr. ‘is ready to play this week, compared to last week’:

“Just one more week of rest and rehabilitation. There’s been a lot more work that’s been able to be accomplished on that hamstring, and just a lot more recovery and a lot more progress. It’s definitely firing at a much different level than it was last week.”

On if either OLB Kyler Fackrell or DB Mark Webb Jr. will be activated off of Reserve/Injured; Designated for Return:

“They’re very close. We’re figuring that out. They’ve both been on the practice field this week. We’re going to decide what’s best for them here in the next couple of days.”

On the depth of the tight end group following TE Jared Cook being placed on Reserve/COVID-19:

“[TEs] Tre’ McKitty and Stephen [Anderson] will hold the rope for us there. We’ll take some of that other stuff with [FB] Gabe Nabers and [TE] Hunter Kampmoyer.”

On ‘if they will pay attention to the Ravens’ and Dolphins’ games before their game, due to playoff implications’:

“We will not. Our full focus will be on Denver and their team and doing what it takes to perform at our best versus them.”

On ‘if it would be too distracting to pay attention to other teams’ games’:

“No, it’s just because the NFL deserves your full attention. If you’re looking at anybody else, then you’re going to get beat by the team that’s right in front of you. That’s what the shield of the NFL represents; making sure that you respect the game. That’s what we’re going to do. Denver is an outstanding team. They’re extremely well-coached and they have a ton of really, really good players. They beat us the first time. They have our full attention.”

On the week of practice:

“Extremely upbeat, extremely focused. I would say that the execution level has been where we expect it to be. The response has been exactly what I would expect from the men and the women in our organization.”

On ‘if it is important to play with energy and juice this week’:

“Having the right energy, the right focus — you never know how the game is going to express itself. You can’t just say, ‘Hey, this is how the game is going to go.’ It doesn’t work like that. Life doesn’t work like that. You have to be able to figure it out as the game happens. What you can control is your energy, your focus and your togetherness, and that’s what we’re going to focus on Sunday.”

On ‘what leading the team to the playoffs in his first season would mean to him’:

“I say this with full respect to you, and I respect the question, and I understand it fully — we have to play the Denver Broncos on Sunday. That’s where our full focus is. It’s not on that other stuff. We have to treat this week with the respect that it deserves. Our focus is on Denver and their team, their players and their coaching staff. That’s where we need to be, and that’s where we are with that.”

On ‘confirming’ that TE Jared Cook is ‘out’ for Sunday:

“Not officially. Unlikely [to play], but not officially [out].”

On the rest of the players currently on Reserve/COVID-19:

“It’ll be that day-to-day operation.”

On if he is ‘monitoring’ the amount of playing time for players coming off of Reserve/COVID-19 that previously experienced COVID-19 symptoms:

“I think what we’ve tried to do, with the guys coming back that are actually at the practices, is we’re able to track their data, in terms of the practices and the GPS and all of that stuff that talks about their load, their mileage, how fast they’ve run. I feel like we have a good gauge on the people that have come back. Now, these guys that are coming off the list tomorrow, where we don’t have that same gauge, then that’s going to have to be a minute-by-minute, play-by-play, series-by-series operation between the player and the coaching staff. Like I said, that’s why we’re going to have to really be connected, and why several people within those position groups have to be ready to play if they need a break. I think what this whole situation reveals is that you need to have all hands on deck and you need to make a lot of adjustments at the game. That’s what we’re going to try and do.”

On who would start at safety opposite of James Jr. if S Nasir Adderley and S Alohi Gilman are not activated off of Reserve/COVID-19 in time for Sunday’s game:

“[DB] Trey [Marshall] would start if they were not there.”

On if K Tristan Vizcaino’s development:

“Tristan is improving. It’s been something that I’ve enjoyed watching take place, with the relationship between [K] Dustin [Hopkins] and Tristan, being able to have those two guys work together every single day and for Tristan to learn the game with Dustin, and being able to tap into some of his experiences. Tristan is an improving player. That was the goal from the beginning, where I’m really glad that we have him. Dustin has kicked extremely well for us. I thought that he was a real highlight of the game last week for us. I think he’s performing well. Hopeful to get him back. I’ve also been pleased with Tristan’s progress and making improvements as a kicker.”

On if Vizcaino would assume field goal, extra point and kickoff duties on Sunday if Hopkins is not activated off of Reserve/COVID-19:

“Yes, he would.”

On the signing of LS Beau Brinkley:

“I’ve really enjoyed joining up with this guy. I don’t know if you guys have had the pleasure to meet him, but he’s just a tremendous guy and has stepped right in. He’s definitely one of us. I really enjoy that part of the NFL, joining up with guys on short notice and onboarding them into our way of doing things. He’s been such a breath of fresh air with us. I think he’s a great example for some of our young guys — we have so many young guys on our team, to see a guy just come in in the second-to-last week of the regular season and to be able to step right in and do his job at a high level and show that level of professionalism, it’s been fun to watch. I’ve really enjoyed getting to know Beau.”

SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR DERIUS SWINTON II

On K Tristan Vizcaino:

“He’s done a good job. For a young guy, having that game experience and then being put on practice squad — I think he’s progressed in a good way. He’s just changed some of his technique, tinkering with some things, talking to [K] Dustin [Hopkins] about what’s worked for him long-term in the NFL. It’s been really good for him. Seeing his progress, especially kicking on some of the days that the weather hasn’t been great, he’s done a really good job. He’s stepped up this week with Dustin not in practice. He didn’t kick with the team because of the fields and all of that, but just seeing his progress from a young guy who hadn’t kicked in but one game before this — a regular-season game — to now, he’s a guy with experience, has learned from it and now just tinkering some of that technique stuff. He’s been really good.”

On Vizcaino learning from K Dustin Hopkins:

“It’s been great. I just think it’s like, you have [QB] Chase [Daniel] for [QB] Justin [Herbert], experience-wise. Some of the experiences that they’ve gone through — the weather that they’ve kicked in, the techniques that they’ve changed over their career. I think it’s the same correlation. Dustin, just being able to bounce things off of him. Days that Dustin isn’t kicking and Tristan is, Tristan can say, ‘Hey, can you watch this?’ They’ll go on the side and have these conversations that only they know because, obviously, I haven’t kicked in the NFL. It’s just one of those things where they can have those side conversations, those experiences and I think it’s been really good for him.”

On LS Beau Brinkley:

“He’s a very experienced vet. He’s a guy that has done it for a long, long time at a high level. Earlier this year, he was where I was last year in Arizona. That was an easy transition for him. He comes in and goes, ‘Hey, your depth charts look kind of the same.’ He goes, ‘A lot of the stuff you say is the same,’ and even the way we break as a specialist group, he goes, ‘Oh, I know that, too.’ Just the correlation for a guy to step in and basically know the system that he has already participated in games this year with, just with a different color of jersey on. Then, being able to help the young guys. It’s the same thing as Dustin [Hopkins], being able to have those conversations, ‘Hey, if we get this look, teams try to do this. When I was in Tennessee, earlier this year when I was in Arizona, some of these things happened.’ Just having him here, it really calms you in case [LS] Matt [Overton] isn’t there because it’s a guy that’s done it in your system earlier this year and just isn’t coming off the street and hasn’t done anything.”

On the kickoff returns last week:

“I think they were really good. [WR Maurice] Ffrench, he’s a guy that has potential — really big potential, really big speed. I think you saw on the first one, he might have missed a cut, but he showed his speed. Then, [WR Michael] Bandy, I commended him this week because I always say to the young guys in training camp, ‘There’s a difference between being in the NFL and being a pro.’ I say, ‘Guys, some guys are just happy being in the NFL. Then, you call on them to do things and they don’t really show up.’ I go, ‘But Bandy really showed that he’s a pro.’ It’s funny, he didn’t take a team rep with the kickoff return team since it was the Seattle week in the preseason. Then, to step in there and have productive returns past the 25-yard line at a moment’s notice — it’s really commendable to him to be a real pro. That’s just something that, for us down the road as young guys come in, say, ‘Hey, I have a job to do whether I get reps or not. I step up to the plate.’ That was really good for that room.”

On if the moving parts would ‘affect the decision-making of the staff on fourth down’:

“I think we have to wait and see who shows up to the game. I think that’s every week. Then, once you get to the game, see who you have and seeing how the game goes. I think that plays into a factor, first, before you worry about who you have. 90 minutes before, we’ll know who we have up for the game. Just like anybody else, that will dictate what you can do, as far as if it’s a guy with a big leg and all of those things. Then, as you get into the game, you let the game dictate your decision-making. You talk about some of it beforehand, but you try to play the flow of the game and situation. Those things do come into play at a certain amount, but you don’t let it, I think, make you go too far one way or the other.”

On P Ty Long's performance this season:

"I think it hasn't been up to his standard. If you ask him that, I think he'll say that just the net punting hasn't been up to his standard. I think the last few weeks has been really good. He's come back as the Ty we know. I think there was a middle stretch there in the middle of the season where it wasn't up to his standard. He'll even tell you that. I think he still shows the potential to be a guy that we can lean on in a big spot. In the Cincinnati game at the end of the game, he did a great job. If you go back and watch these games down the stretch, he's been really, really good. I think he's just getting back to his fundamentals, staying tight in the pocket. He's a guy that we've seen can do good things for us, long-term. I would say it was inconsistent to the point of what we want, but he'll tell you that, too. I think it's trending back up as we round this second turn, hopefully, into the playoff push."

On if punt protection has been a factor in Long's performance:

"I think, as a coach, you want to be like, 'Ah that stuff shouldn't, he just does his job,' but I think it does at certain points. I think it does affect, situationally, what you're doing — getting the ball out quick at the end of games, that can affect your net [punting average]. I think he'll tell you that he trusts the guys in front of him, but that's a normal thing, just like a quarterback. If he feels the rush every single time, yeah, it's going to affect the way he gets the ball out of his hands. I think that's where you come down, like I said, the last three games we've had a consistent punt group that's been together. That really has gotten him at-ease with some of those things. Those things do affect you. I don't think it's made him change anything. It's just that you see things that might not be there. As he's calmed down with this unit that we have now, I think he's in a good spot."

On how special teams is affected by COVID absences:

"We have our plan, a return plan of what we want to get done. Some of it, when you look at the film with the players during the week, you say, 'This guy should be here, this guy should be here.' Then, as the week goes and the COVID hits, you say, 'Hey, listen. Look back at the body type that the coaches put in those spots and you just try to play connect the dots.' They've had a bigger guy in this spot, so it might be, based off COVID and who's coming up, it might be that guy, it might be that guy — but you don't change your plan at all because the plan is the plan. You don't base your plan too much on people instead of what the coaches concepts are, the people and body types that he puts in certain places. Personnel-wise, like last week against Houston, we're looking pre-game and I was like, 'Okay, who's that guy? Okay, that's a new guy.' Then, as the game goes along, you kind of get a feel once they say, 'Okay, this is who we're elevating.' You kind of get the feeling for who's elevating from special teams to offense and defense, and then, who do they bring up for COVID flexes that will probably take their spot on teams. It's not throw out the baby with the bathwater, I think it's more, 'Okay guys, here's our plan,' and we kind of just go from there and execute it based off what we have and who they put up."

On 'if he's ever seen where a team got wiped out' in-season:

"No, I don't think anybody has ever gotten wiped out. I don't know. In my time, we've had the lockout, but we didn't play preseason games — not really. Not at this level. I think there has been games where an offensive guy or two wide receivers have gotten knocked out starting and now they have some teams guys. This is rare for all of us. I was talking to [General Manager] Tom Telesco about this, you're determining playoff fates with preseason rosters, at a point. It's no offense to the guys on practice squad, but you have 13 guys out, you have guys that haven't — whether they've been with your team for one week or 15 weeks — that haven't played in games, to now decide playoff fates. That's just where we are. It's tough. I think those guys that are getting opportunities — it's a good opportunity to show that they belong on the 53 or 46. It's rare. This is a rare, rare thing. You just do the best you can, really. It's what all of us are trying to do right now."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On the first matchup against the Broncos earlier this season:

“It was one of those tough games that we felt like we could have played better. They beat us. Unfortunately, we didn’t move the ball as well as we could have. I turned the ball over too many times; that’s on us to correct.”

On preparing for Sunday’s game against the Broncos:

“I think it’s just executing. We have to have a solid protection plan. We have to have a great run game. We have to be able to push the ball down the field.”

On playing last week’s game against the Texans without WRs Mike Williams and Jalen Guyton:

“We believe in those guys. Unfortunately, we didn’t come away with a win. But we believe in those guys. They stepped up and they did a great job. They spent a lot of time out on practice. I think that’s a lot of the stuff that people don’t see, that they put in the work. I know that if they get another shot, they’re going to make the most of it.”

On the ‘pressure’ of having to win out to have a chance at the playoffs:

“I think there’s only pressure if you make it. The guys feel the urgency. They know that these games mean a lot. It’s all about going out there and executing and playing the football that we know that we’re capable of. We’ve had a good week of practice. It’s all about dialing it in these next couple of days and getting ready for Sunday.”

On the offensive line ‘looking very healthy right now’:

“It’s huge. We really believe in those guys. They’ve done an incredible job all whole year of protecting, blocking and opening up lanes for the run game. To have some of those guys step back in, it’s huge for our offensive line.”

On ‘adapting to disguised defenses’:

“I feel we’ve done a great job with that because we see that defense all the time. We see [S] Derwin James [Jr.] and [S] Nasir Adderley disguising their looks. I think that’s one of the great things about having our camp with our defense of going through that and learning and having to go through those experiences so that when you do see that in a game, you’re better equipped to handle it.”

On WR Mike Williams:

“He’s an incredibly gifted receiver. He makes some special plays happen on the outside. He’s a huge part of our offense. To have a guy like that back, it gives you a sense of security because you know that he’s going to go up there and make a play happen.”

On ‘what leading the Chargers to the playoffs in his second season would mean to him’:

“I think that’s maybe a question for the next couple of weeks. This is all about the Denver Broncos and we’re going to do everything we can to win this game to have a chance to do that. All of our focus has been on the Denver Broncos this week.”

On re-watching all of his interceptions from this season:

“It’s all a learning process. Unfortunately, you never want to be able to throw those interceptions; you never have to want to go through that. But you look back and realize that they weren’t bad decisions. I was on the right guy, I was on the right throw, just have to make a better throw or re-analyze, or maybe it’s footwork. To go back, as painful as it is, you have to watch those and you have to get better from them.”

On batted-down passes on RPOs:

“I think that it’s awfully tough. In the quick game, the ball is going to be out quick. Some of the D-linemen, they do a good job of getting their hands up. When the ball is tipped like that, you don’t have much control over the ball. I think that’s the unfortunate part, but there’s nothing you can do about it. You have to step out, and then in the next play, you have to be back at it. Whether you throw the three interceptions or four, you have to go, on the next drive, and put your team in a position to win. It’s all about how you handle it.”

On any potential similarities in his three interceptions returned for touchdowns:

“I think they made a good play on it. Unfortunately, I’d like to have all three of those balls back to make a better decision, but that’s the unfortunate part about the NFL. You have to live with it.”

On Broncos CB Patrick Surtain II:

“He’s a really good corner. He’s done a great job of matching up with receivers all year long. They play a really tough defense. They’re really well-coached. It’s on us to watch as much film as we can to have any chance on Sunday.”