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## Chargers Week 4 Media Availability

Wednesday, September 27, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

**On if the team is utilizing a 'next man up mentality' following WR Mike Williams being placed on Reserve/Injured:**

"Yes, next man up. It's the NFL. We're going to miss Mike [Williams]. He means a lot to us. As you guys know, he's one of the premier players at his position. As I mentioned, he means a lot to us, but this is part of the NFL. We're going to have to elevate our game around him and it's going to give new opportunities for some guys, and we expect them to play well."

**On an update regarding S Derwin James Jr.:**

"He didn't practice today. His status is to be determined."

**On the 'impact' of having 'premium players' on the team's injury report today:**

"If you look at every injury report of every team in the NFL, all 32 of them, you're going to see a premium player that is on it. It's just part of the NFL. You move on, you make good plans. Each week is different. When you face something like that, you have to adjust and get ready for a game. Today was our first day trying to get ready for it."

**On players listed with 'illness' on today's injury report and 'if the illness is all the same':**

"No, they're different."

**On if he is 'concerned' about OLB Khalil Mack and OLB Joey Bosa appearing on today's injury report:**

"No. We'll keep updating you throughout the week. Their status for the game is to be determined."

**On 'the mindset when drafting' WR Quentin Johnston:**

"I think our mindset was that we wanted to take the best player that was there at our pick. We just feel like he had a lot of first-round-caliber characteristics for receiver. Felt like he brought a dimension that we were looking for in our offense, that big play-making ability, run-after-catch ability. We felt like his size would be a big asset for our team. We believe in that. His makeup, he was a captain at TCU. We knew that he would improve because he was going to work hard. He had a lot of talent, but his work ethic really stood out to us, too. He hasn't disappointed. Now, he's just going to get a bigger opportunity."

**On third-down penalties:**

"I think that each penalty has a different story. What you're trying to do is get people to play with the right technique, play with the right leverage. I think each penalty is different, whether it was an actual penalty or not, what you're trying to do is educate why, maybe, that flag was thrown. There are some that we don't agree with, and there are some that we do. The ones that we can learn from, that's what you're after, to play penalty-free. I know how much we emphasize it every day around here. It's a big part of our blueprint. It's why we have officials at every practice that we have — OTAs, training camp and during the regular season. Our guys have to continue to learn and play the right technique so that they can avoid some of those penalties."

**On this week's game against the Raiders and the first AFC West game of the season:**

"Your division is the most important thing in your ability to make the playoffs, and, ultimately, become a Super Bowl champion. You have to make sure that the division, you get to play those teams six times a year, and you understand that these traditions go back a long way and that there's a lot of pride in each franchise. There's going to be a lot of energy in the stadium. All of the division games, there's just a different caliber of energy. You know each other a lot better — certainly, with this group, with the same head coach, we've played these guys and they've played us. It's going to be a really big-time environment on Sunday."

**On John Carroll University and the college's connections to this week's game against the Raiders:**

"John Carroll is just a really unique football place. You can say that the stars have aligned there, but I don't think it's a coincidence, the type of people that have come out of there, because it's in a lot of different eras. I think why that place is special is because the place itself is really unique, as a school, and then the football blueprint, it just has a special footprint in the league, starting, really, in New England, but it's all levels of football — it's executives, it's coaches, it's scouts. It's really a special place. I know that it means a lot to all of us. It has kind of brought a lot of us together from different eras. [Raiders General Manager] Dave [Ziegler] and [Raiders Head Coach] Josh [McDaniels] are a big part of that, they both played there. [Raiders Defensive Quality Control Coach] Matt Feeney is on that staff, a guy that played for me, that was a great player for us. Obviously, we have [Passing Game Specialist] Tom Arth and [General Manager] Tom [Telesco] here. Just one of those special places and proud to be a part of it."

**On the Raiders' 'uncertainty at quarterback this week':**

"We know that there's a big body of work with [Raiders QB] Brian Hoyer, being in their system in several different locations — twice in New England, and now being in Las Vegas. We were able to see [Raiders QB Aidan] O'Connell play in the preseason, and did a lot of work on him coming out of the draft. He's a guy that we definitely have to be prepared for, as well."

**On RB Austin Ekeler:**

"Just getting him in individual [period] was good, to get them out there with the guys. That just means that he's progressing and improving. If you know Austin [Ekeler], you know that he's going to do everything he can to get back."

**On if he has had to 'explain anything' to Ekeler regarding his injury:**

"No, he's a pro. We're going to make sure that he's out there when he is ready."

**On if the upcoming bye week plays a factor in any of the 'injury considerations':**

"In certain cases, yes."

**On the offense's fourth-down play-call near the end of Week 3:**

"They made a good [defensive] line stunt on the play and got penetration kind of at the point of attack. 90 [Vikings DL Jonathan Bullard] made a good play. You have to give credit to them on that play."

**On CB J.C. Jackson and 'the plan moving forward' and 'if he could be active, but not start':**

"I think all options are open."

**On the running backs contributing in pass protection in Week 3:**

"I appreciate you doing the work there, that's specific. I love that and I appreciate that. What I mentioned after the game was that it's the type of pressure that it was. It's six or seven guys coming every snap, so the fact that we avoided any of those huge hits, even — like, forget the sacks, but just, 'Man, did he take a beating?' There wasn't any of that. Your backs have to be a big factor in that equation. My hat's off to [Running Backs Coach] Derrick Foster and our offensive staff, for getting those guys ready, and then for [RB] Josh [Kelley] and [RB] Isaiah [Spiller] to go do the work. They were very impactful because they were picking up a guy every single time, pretty much. They were a big factor in [QB] Justin's [Herbert] success."

**On if Sunday's win 'was a move in the right direction':**

"I liked the way our guys stayed composed in those gotta-have-it situations. We've been through a lot of games like that since I've been here. I felt like our guys have been comfortable in that those circumstances. We emphasize it a lot. Coming out of it, that was one of the highlights for us, is the way we played in the situations in the game — end of half, end of game, red zone on both sides of the ball. I felt like that's the sign of a good team. You have to be able to do that on the road, pack your team on the road in a hostile environment. It was a must-win kind of game for both teams. We were both playoff teams last year, so it was high caliber. Proud of the guys. We finished the game. There was a lot to take away from that game."

**On S JT Woods and 'evaluating his play on Sunday with limited snaps':**

"It's a balance. I think that you guys that have been with JT [Woods] know the progress that he's made. I think, in the first two games, really in the Miami game, I thought he tackled exceptionally well in that game. Then, in the Tennessee game, he was a factor in that game. You know, back there at safety, there are going to be times where you miss. Every special safety that I've ever coached is going to have some misses. I think the process of him being such a young player is just understanding the angles, the leverage — 'Hey, why did that miss happen?' The next time, you can continue to be aggressive in your approach. He's learning, but I think the fact that he's gained more and more experience is going to be big for us over the course of the season. When you can win a big game like that and learn from your mistakes, I think it helps you moving forward."

## **QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**

### **On WR Mike Williams:**

"I feel horrible for the guy. He's such a great teammate, such a great friend. Anytime you go through an injury like that it is going to be tough. We as a team have to do our best to be there for him. Help him out however we can and know that he's going to come back stronger than ever."

### **On replacing Williams' production:**

"I think you just have to rely on the guys behind him to step up and do their job. Thankfully, we've got a ton of reps with them so far. I'm looking forward to seeing those guys compete."

### **On how trust develops with the receivers:**

"I think, probably just getting reps with them. Whether it's in practice or whether it's in games. Getting the timing down, knowing where he's going to be and understanding the type of ball that I need to deliver to him."

### **On building trust with WR Joshua Palmer after practice in 2021:**

"A ton. They're reps, they're all valuable. He did a great job of being out there and wanting to get better. He's done a great job over the past couple of years of perfecting his craft and he's still out there working right now. I am not surprised by all of his success."

### **On the difference of practice as compared to game reps:**

"I think if you treat every practice rep like a game rep, you're able to get that accomplished. I think we've done a great job of that here. Treating every practice, of every rep like, 'Hey this is the most important one.' To have guys that focus like that, I think that means a lot to our offense."

### **On Palmer:**

"He stepped up big time. We found out that he's a competitor, he wants to be the best. He wants to go out there, make big plays and he's able to do that. We can trust and we rely on him. You can put him all over the field, a bunch of different positions. He's done a great job picking up everything that we've asked him to do."

### **On injuries impact the team:**

"It's always tough to lose a guy like that. You feel horrible for him. As a team, kind of like I said earlier, we have to be there for him and help him through this. It's an awfully tough situation. Personally, have been through that before. That's what is important. To rely on the guys behind him to step up and know that it's a long season, it's part of the NFL. Guys are going to get hurt. There is adversity, but it's how you react to it. We just have to trust that the guys behind him are going to step up, do their job and make some plays."

### **On not committing a turnover:**

"I think having a great plan. It starts with [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore] and our quarterbacks coach [Doug Nussmeier]. Everyone in that quarterback room has done a great job in preparing me and treating every rep like it's a game rep. To have receivers that go up and fight for the ball, and an offensive line that has done a great job of protecting us. I think our running backs, as well, have done a great job in protection, picking up blitzes and extra pressures like that. A lot goes into it, but I think practice is one of the biggest things, too."

### **On winning close games:**

"I think you're trying to win every single game. Whether it's through the air, or on the ground. Whether it's offense or defense. It takes all three phases. I thought as an offense, a defense and as special teams, I thought we all stepped up big-time. The defense came up with big stops when we needed it to. The offense went down and scored the ball when we needed it to. It's not going to always be pretty. To have three phases that fight for one another, for each other. I think that's big for our team."

**On his success passing against the blitz:**

"I think it starts with having a good plan. I think that starts up front. [Offensive Line] Coach Nuge [Brendan Nugent], [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore] and [Quarterbacks Coach] Doug [Nussmeier], they put together a great plan, offensively. We felt tight in our protections and making sure that everything was blocked up. We watched a ton of film and saw whatever they were going to bring. We felt like we were prepared going into the week. Anytime you feel like you're prepared, you're going to play better. As long as we're putting together a good plan protection-wise, I think that gives us a shot up front to do some special things."

**On if he was 'surprised' at how much Minnesota blitzed during the game:**

"That's a good question. I don't think during the game that we thought too much of it. I think you just go out there and react to it. You try not to think too much about what they're doing. Just go out, see the field for what it is and react to it. I think that's one of those great things about having such a tight quarterback room, is that we're able to go off on the sideline, talk about, discuss it. Talk exactly about what they're bringing each drive. To have [QB Easton] Stick and to have [QB] Max Dug [Duggan] and [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore], they see the game really well. It helps me a ton being able to come off the field and talk to them."

**On if he was 'surprised' at how much Minnesota blitzed when he watched the game on film:**

"It was a lot. There was a lot of pressure. Kind of like I said, I thought we had a great plan. It starts up front. Those guys battled. The running backs did a great job of picking up their blitzers, too."

**On what he's seen from WR Quentin Johnston:**

"A ton. He's one of those guys that's going to have to step up big-time. We're expecting big things from him. He's a smart player. He's really athletic. You have to just get the ball in his hands and something special is going to happen. He's done a great job battling so far."

**On facing the Raiders:**

"Every game in the NFL is important. This is the most important one because it's our next. The Raiders are a really good football team. It's going to require all of our attention and a great week of preparation, of practice, to have any shot on Sunday."

**On Raiders DE Maxx Crosby:**

"I think he's very good. He's one of the best at what he does. He's definitely one of those guys that you have to be aware of whenever he's on the field."

**On the crowd noise at Minnesota:**

"It was, it's a very loud stadium. I think the great thing that we do is that we practice silent cadence all the time. I think, up front, it's important for those guys being able to get off the ball. The more we practice that, the better we are. I think communication is big, too, in those type of situations."

**On if the Minnesota game compared to 'any other game' he's played 'in terms of crowd noise':**

"I think a lot of the domes are pretty loud just because the noise echoes. A bunch of the stadiums that we play across the league — Arrowhead, I think the Vegas stadium is very loud, as well. Just having those experiences of being in loud stadiums, I think that prepared us, as well."

**On if views Chargers and Raiders matchups 'like in the 1980s and early 1990s':**

"I, unfortunately, wasn't around in the '80s and '90s [*laughter*], so I don't know quite what it was like. We know that they're a very good football team, so we have to do our best to have a good week of practice because we know what they're capable of. We have to be at our best come Sunday."