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Chargers Media Availability

Monday, October 11, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On G Oday Aboushi's injury status:

"Oday Aboushi has an ACL tear. That will require surgery."

On the plan moving forward at RG:

"It'll be how yesterday's game unfolded, where we put [G/T Michael] Schofield [III] in at right guard. Backing him up will be [G/T] Brenden [Jaimies]. Then, possibly, looking elsewhere for some possibilities."

On LB Drue Tranquill's injury status:

"Still unpacking some more information today. He's meeting with our doctors and our trainers this morning. We'll learn a lot more later today."

On if 'the plan was for RB Austin Ekeler to run the clock down' prior to scoring a touchdown on the final offensive possession:

"Yes, sir."

On TE Donald Parham Jr.:

"I think that when we got here, as a coaching staff, we were really excited about some of the things that he can bring to the table from a tight end position, because we feel like he can play both in-line and split from the formation. I think that [Offensive Coordinator] Joe Lombardi and [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day, and [Tight Ends Coach] Kevin Koger, that group of guys — [Wide Receivers Coach] Chris Beatty — in the passing game really felt that this guy could bring us something. Then, in the run game, [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach] Frank Smith and [Assistant Offensive Line Coach] Shaun Sarrett felt like this guy is a lot better in-line blocker than people realize because he has long levers, he's a good athlete. We just felt that we could utilize him in a couple of different ways, and not just as a pass-catching tight end. I think that's what he has given us; he's given us a lot more as a blocker than I think people would have expected. He had a really nice pass protection rep on [WR] Mike's [Williams] long play-action pass. He was kind of blocking the edge there. The other thing that he gives you is that he can run after the catch. That's where, I think, you really see that basketball dimension express itself. This guy can create with the ball in his hands for a guy that is 6-foot-8. We've really enjoyed coaching him. He's continuing to develop for us. Really proud of his development because he makes us much more challenging to defend."

On going for it on fourth-and-two from the Chargers' 24-yard line in the third quarter:

"I felt like, at that point in the game, that we really needed to possess the ball, for a couple of different reasons. I felt like our defense needed to get its cleats in the ground and we needed to make some adjustments, and I felt like by going for it and making it, it would give us a little bit more time to settle in, get our composure. I felt like it would achieve that. Fourth-and-two, we feel like that's an advantageous situation for us. We kind of knew, based off of that field zone — and I know that it was backed up — that maybe we could kind of catch them in an advantage look for us. I really liked the play call because it was a run tagged with the option to throw it, so we had a couple of good run solutions in that call. I felt like Joe [Lombardi] was really dialed in on some of those fourth downs, for sure. I felt like we communicated well. What that fourth down did was we were able to get on track, then able to finish that drive with a touchdown, which I really felt like changed the dynamics of the game, really helped us on defense, and then really helped us on offense, too, knowing that we're going to score and we're going to be able to finish this game playing the right way. From that point on, we really started to play well defensively and really shift the momentum our way. I was really proud of our guys in how they executed on that on that series because, it was that fourth down, and then another one on the fourth-and-seventh to [WR] Keenan [Allen] that allowed us to score."

On G/T Michael Schofield III's performance yesterday:

"I thought Scho did a really good job. I felt like he battled in there, and I really felt like gave us exactly what we kind of hoped when we brought him here, just that steady veteran presence. You can't minimize that experience of what he gives you. I think that him being able to work on that side of the ball with [T] Storm [Norton], just giving us that experience over there, I think that that was really big for us. I'm really proud of the way he played."

On 'how much QB Justin Herbert matches up to the quarterback that he dreamt of when he envisioned being an NFL head coach':

"Better, for sure. I think it starts with just his makeup. When you're a head coach, you want your quarterback to be the face of the team — and not just because of his talent, you want him to be the face of your team because of what his makeup is and what a hard worker he is and how humble he is, what a competitor he is, what a great teammate he is. That's what you want from your quarterback. From the physical standpoint, you want your quarterback to be able to make plays a lot of different ways, and that's the way Justin is built. He can beat you with his arm in a lot of different ways, he can play within the rhythm and the timing of the passing game truly within the pocket. You have to win this game from within the pocket and he can do that. He can access all the different parts of the field. He can throw it deep, intermediate, short, a layered ball, all of that. He can throw on the moving in the keeper play-pass game. Then, he can buy time with his legs and create offense when there isn't a lot of offense on schedule. I think that he's a fierce competitor. His teammates really believe in him. What you saw yesterday, too, is what I think is a real strength of his, which is his composure. He's a really calm player. I think that brings the best out in his teammates because they never sense that this guy is sped up, and that's a really good front that we played against and a really good defense. I think that has a calming effect on his teammates and his coaches. I'm really proud of the way that he played. It's awesome to team up with him every week, that's for sure."

On 'what is preventing' G/T Brenden Jaimes from starting at RG:

"For us, it's just given him more time to develop. It's not an ability issue right now for us, it's not like, 'Oh, this guy's not capable of playing in the NFL right now,' because that's not the case. We just want to make sure that he's ready full-time. He's progressing really well, and I'm not just saying that. We just felt like at this point in the season, having a guy that that could come in with some experience could help, based off of who we have outside of him, too — [T] Rashawn [Slater] and Storm [Norton] our new players, we feel like. That steady inside presence for us, right now, we just feel like is such an advantage. We're talking to Brendan all the time. It's not like I'm the least bit hesitant to put this guy in the game, like this guy has the tools to play offensive line in this league, and we believe that. It's similar to [TE] Tre' McKitty and what's going on. There's a timeline, I think, in terms of when you know he's going to be ready to go, but we're really optimistic about this guy as a swing O-lineman in there. We're definitely not disappointed at all."

On S Derwin James Jr.'s premise of 'whooping the man in front of you' to improve the run defense:

"I agree with that premise fully. I think what we need to do, at the first level of our defense, is play more fundamentally sound. That's what happened yesterday on the first level, is that we weren't fundamentally sound at the point of attack. If we can stay on our keys, if we can play thicker on blocks, on our keys instead of playing behind our key — what that does is when you play behind your key or you kind of soften up early in the down, what it does is it lets that run get started. Now you have a tougher run to deal with, with a runner that's really tough to deal with. At the point of attack, with our interior guys and our edge players, we weren't good enough early in the game. Now, you can find instances of us playing the right way, similar to Dallas. What we've got to do is play more consistent and fundamentally, and then behind it, make sure that we have little alignment things that I think can help our guys. Then, we have to go tackle. There were a couple of times where we had an unblocked offender that misses. Their backs do that. As you guys saw, those two guys are the real thing. They've been doing it to everybody. Run defense is an 11-man operation. You have to play team defense against a team like that. For us, it really starts up front, playing better at the first level. What happens is your second- and third-level players will play better because they're going to be more sure of where to go. When they're not sure of where the ball is going up front, then what happens is you have a bunch of people kind of doing this, no one's really attacking the line of scrimmage — definitely getting to work today with our guys, but excited to get to that work because we have the right guys for it. We have to do a better job of coaching because these guys are all in. We have to do a better job coaching. It really starts with me of just being more exacting. These guys will do whatever we ask. I'm excited to get to work on that this week."

On what led to Browns TE David Njoku's 71-yard touchdown pass:

"We had a miscommunication. It was an empty adjustment for us where we should have had our outside rusher to the field in coverage. What happened was he wasn't out there. What everyone tried to do is kind of make up for him not being out there, and it kind of affected the positioning of the people on that side. Regardless of the circumstance, it should have been a 15-yard gain. OK, you give up a pass, go tackle it for 15 yards, get back in the huddle and we'll fix the adjustment. But, because that guy was kind of uncovered, Nas [S Nasir Adderley] was in a poor position then. He has to tackle that guy. We have to finish and get that guy on the ground. It was a poor play for us. It was the worst of the day. When I say I take ownership, it's that I have to make sure that our guys understand how to play that formation. It's something that we cover a lot and we need to cover better because, as you can see, one thing being out of place affects a lot of other people. That's certainly what happened on that play."

On his approach to offensive situations where the primary objective is to 'run down the clock':

"It's an excellent point. Yesterday, I was really proud on the toss sweep — we had 39 Toss Crack, Alert No Más — him sliding to force the timeout. On the next play, that was also a 'No Más' situation. What we discussed during the week was that what we didn't want to do is go backwards, because that actually decreases your win probability — like if you take a knee and go backwards — what we wanted to do was go forward and take a knee. That was our approach because that increases your odds of winning. When he's going up the middle, as soon as he gets through traffic, we've instructed him to go down. What ended up happening was there was a little bit of a pause. We didn't go down. All of a sudden, we get pulled into the end zone, which was not our intent. Our intent was to finish the game with the ball closer to the goal line and take the clock down and be able to either score the touchdown or kick it to win it, but certainly finish with the ball. We have to do a better job of explaining that because [RB] Austin [Ekeler] is a stud, and just putting him through that even more where he doesn't get absorbed and we put ourselves at risk. It's certainly something that I need to do a better job of managing, for sure, and we will move forward. I'm proud of the way that our defense responded, similar to Kansas City. But we certainly want to finish the game — and we should finish the game — with the ball."

On Ekeler's final touchdown run where he 'was pulled into the end zone' by the Browns defense:

"He can be pulled in if he hasn't given himself up. I kind of had a tougher angle to see it. I probably shouldn't have said it that way, because that's what we coach our guys to do on defense, to absorb the runner and pull them in. What we have to do before we can get absorbed by the defense is make sure we go down. From my vantage point, initially, it looked like he was giving himself up and pulling back, but that's all there. What Cleveland did was really smart and exactly what they should have done. Like I said, I have to do a better job of explaining that to our offensive players because I think that our process, our intent, was the right one — to finish closer to the goal line, that was our intent, to go forward and get down, because the farther you go back on a kneel down, the more you decrease your chances of winning and all that. The intent was to go forward, get down, then either finish with a touchdown or kick it to win it. That was our intent. Certainly, our execution needs to be better. That's coaching. That's not on our players, that's on me."

On the option of QB Justin Herbert taking a knee in that situation:

"You could go forward on a quarterback sneak-oriented [play]. You could go that direction. That's not the route that we chose to go. We would choose to go the quarterback sneak if we're inside the one [-yard line] going for the win. But, our thought process was to hand the [32] Duo, knowing that they're going to be in a freeway type defense, where we can get the direct run, and then go down. That was our approach. Then, our approach was going to be if we get inside of the one [-yard line], the quarterback sneak is the most efficient run inside of the one [-yard line]. That was our thought process. Certainly, like you're saying, our execution needs to be better."

On the 'miscommunication' on the second-quarter touchdown to Browns WR Rashard Higgins:

"[CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.] should be on the guy man-to-man outside, which would take the route away."

On T Rashawn Slater telling the running backs 'not to help chip' the edge rusher on prior to executing a route on pass plays:

"I think that says a couple of things. Number one, what we've tried to do is create real trust and communication with our guys, that they can speak up and have a voice to express themselves. In that particular instance, and if you talk to O-linemen just in general, sometimes a chip or a nudge can disrupt the timing of their set and actually change their set angle and their rhythm and timing. Rashawn just felt like, 'Hey, I can block this guy. I can block this guy man-to-man.' It says two things that stand out to me — maybe more — but the two things are the trust in the communication to talk to not only Austin [Ekeler], but our offensive coaching staff, and then, number two, the confidence that he has in his ability. I think what you're seeing is a player that is earning the confidence to say that because he has a lot of belief in his game. He has a really good plan of attack versus this pass rusher. We all know [Browns DE] Myles [Garrett] is a defensive player of the year candidate, one of the top rushers in the league, one of the top defensive players in the league. Those are all encouraging signs, to me, both of those things. I'm excited that he feels that way and I'm excited that we were able to get that done for him, because that's what you — you want your players put in positions where they can succeed, and he felt like that was going to be the best position for him to be successful."

On CBs Ryan Smith and Chris Harris Jr.:

"Ryan Smith was outstanding and special teams. I really felt his presence out there. So excited to get him back out there. He's one of us. He's going to provide a lot for our football team, both in the kicking game and as a DB. It was really good to get him out there. I thought that he was productive. I thought that he flashed, for sure, in special teams. I thought Chris coming back, he gives us a calm presence there. He's a guy who can do a lot of different jobs. It was good to have them out there. When you get into those end-of-game, end-of-half situations, he's been through so many of those that you can't minimize the experience that he brings. It allows [S] Derwin [James Jr.] to kind of tone down his job description, too, which is good. Looking forward to continuing down the road with both of those guys because they allow us to kind of have the full depth of the secondary that we're looking for."

On how the ‘exciting play style’ and ‘flashy offense’ suits Los Angeles:

“Certainly, what fans are interested in is high-caliber football. From the aesthetic, offensive football in the modern NFL — as you and I all of us have discussed — offensively, you have to be able to score in this league. When you can do it the way we’re doing it, where, going back to the Lakers, if you want to make that comparison, there were a lot of good offensive players on the Lakers. It wasn’t just [Basketball Hall of Famers] Magic [Johnson] and Kareem [Abdul-Jabbar], you had a lot of players — you know [former Lakers] Michael Cooper, James Worthy, Byron Scott, you had a lot of guys making plays on that team. I think that most people that watch the game like to see a lot of people touch the ball. They want to see that, continuity where it’s not just one person that’s dominating the ball. They want to see a team that can score a lot of different ways. People show up for stars in pro sports, and I think our team has a lot of them, in terms of guys that the average fan is going to say, ‘That person stands out to me.’ We have them in all three phases of the game. The last thing that people are going to show up for is playing a complete team. We want to have a team that’s capable of beating people a lot of different ways. That’s what you got to have, ultimately, because as much as you want to talk about Showtime, like you need Showtime and then you need people that can stop people. That’s what we’re trying to do, is be able to win the game a bunch of different ways because that’s what great teams do. Great teams can beat you a lot of different ways. That’s what we’re trying to accomplish here. Yesterday, that was a track meet. Can you win a track meet? Yeah, we can win a track meet. We can also win a low-scoring game. We can hold really good offenses down. Then, can we make enough plays in the kicking game? We’re still at the beginning, but what I would tell you is that Chargers fans, through five games, have seen us play five real football teams. They have a pretty accurate look about where we’re at so far, because we’ve played five really good teams. Hopefully, they’re going to be showing up even more because, to your point, we have some people that you want to root for.”

On Offensive Coordinator Joe Lombardi and his previous experience as a play-caller:

“I’ve known Joe since I was a 22-year-old fifth-year senior at Mercyhurst [College]. I know the type of coach he is. I know that each circumstance has a life of its own. Sometimes, you have to join up with the right people at the right time, and people that believe in you. I know that I believe in him. I know that he’s learned a lot from that experience. Sometimes, as competitors, you have to learn from when it doesn’t go well, and I know that Joe learned a lot from that experience. I know that he takes full ownership of that experience, that did that one didn’t work out like he had hoped it would. I think that he learned a lot from that, going back to New Orleans. That’s all you can ask for, as a competitor. I knew that it was the right timing for him, and it was certainly the right timing for me. What was important for me was him being able to join up with an offensive staff right that believes in how we want to play, me and him — surround him with an offensive staff that truly believes in how we want to play, and that can also help him, that can also provide a lot to really shape this offense around Justin Herbert. I think that’s what we have. We have a bunch of great guys on that side of the ball that have allowed Joe to be the best version of himself. I think that’s just kind of how life is. I tip my cap to Joe because he’s been calling incredible plays, but I took my cap to our entire offensive staff for helping him be as good as he could be, and then a bunch of players that have totally bought into what he’s telling him each and every day.”

On S Derwin James Jr. wearing the ‘green dot’ to relay the defensive signals and the significance of a defensive back holding that role:

“I think that we wanted someone that was in the middle of our defense. We wanted someone that we knew, for sure, wasn’t going to come out of the game. With as much six DB defenses as we play, sometimes who that single linebacker is, who may traditionally be the green, he may not be on the field the way we play. Last year with the Rams, I knew that J.J. [former Rams and current Browns S John Johnson III] was going to be on the field every single snap. That’s how it began. Here, I knew that Derwin James isn’t coming off of the field. You’re trying to give the green dot to someone that your entire team respects. That’s another big part of it; who can communicate clearly and who has command of the group? I saw J.J. doing that for Cleveland yesterday, and that just looks natural to me. That looks like exactly who should be doing it for them. That’s the way that I feel when Derwin is in front of our defense, I’m like, ‘That’s the guy that that makes sense to me.’ That’s kind of the origin of that. It’s a combination of the six DB thing, and then also that presence, that guy — does he have that? I’ve been fortunate to be at two places that have two of the elite players at their positions in the NFL, because John Johnson is one of the elite safeties in the league and Derwin is one of the elite players in the league — defensive players, for sure, but one of the elite players in the league. That’s what makes both of them so special.”

On if he is 'surprised' that S Jordan Fuller has taken over the 'green dot' responsibility for the Rams:

"Not one bit. He was a two-time captain at Ohio State, one of only 12, I think, in the history of that school. If it wasn't J.J., I know who [Rams CB Jalen] Ramsey would want — I know who he would want to listen to. If you asked A.D. [Rams DT Aaron Donald], I know that he'd be for that because Jordan has that type of makeup. I wouldn't expect anything less."

On if the level of difficulty has increased for a player at the linebacker position:

"I think the variety of the NFL is what makes it so challenging. Yesterday is a good example. You're gonna have to play 13 [one running back, one tight end] personnel, runs that kind of look like two-back, that can spread you out. In 13, they can go empty. There are just there so many more formations, so many more motions, so many different types of plays that you're seeing. The quarterbacking is so much better than it's ever been. The passing game and where the ball can go now, there's just so much more that you have to defend — and, you have the rules, as well, that are sort of different than they used to be. What it's requiring, to me, is a lot more of a complete defensive player that you need to have. You hear me talk a lot about complete defense, a complete player — you need more complete players that can do a little bit of everything. It used to be more specialized, where if you did this one thing, you would be able to really carve out a nice role for yourself. It's not that way anymore. You have to have guys that can do more than one thing because you have to defend a lot. I think that's the difference. The modern linebacker has to defend so much more than 15, 20 years ago. That's why it's stressful. It's stressful. That's why these guys out there doing these jobs are amazing. That's an excellent point, though."

On K Tristan Vizcaino's missed PATs:

"On the first one, there was too much pressure off our right wing. When that flashed, it forced a pull to the left. And then in the last one it was pure fundamentals. It's a technique going up in the game, just like it was for us up front. I'm talking about coaching our front better. Tristan's position is similar, and he's at a point where it was a tough day for him. What I said after the game is we need to make sure we coach the guy and not get so consumed of the result that he missed two. Not focus on the misses, but ask why he missed. Because this guy has a real leg. He's got a good enough leg, he's a good enough player, and we have to do is keep coaching him. And you ask, 'When is that point?' Because with kickers, sometimes that's the reality. I stand behind what I said yesterday, I feel like — we feel like — this guy's a good player. We have to keep coaching him, stay patient with him. Because sometimes it's what guys like this need, patience, and a little bit more experience. That's what we're hoping for, and we're going to stay at it. I know he has the chops, mentally. We're just going to stick with him and keep coaching him."

On the offensive line:

"I can't give enough credit to [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line] Frank [Smith] and [Assistant Offensive Line] Shaun [Sarrett] up front. A lot of the design in the pass protection plan had a lot of variety. We had a lot of variety in our passing game where we had chip, double-nudge, quick-game. We had a lot of different types of pass protections in the game; play action protection, a good third-down pressure plan. You also have to give a lot of credit to our quarterback for playing within the rhythm and timing of the play. Being able to extend a play, create some stuff. I told the team this this morning that the big mission statement of ours is to make sure our offensive line was seen as a tough, rugged bunch of jessies playing out there. We have enough skill players and we've created a real toughness in that group with [C] Corey [Linsley] and [G] Matt [Feiler] and [G] Oday [Aboushi]. It bums me out about Oday because he's got real toughness. And then [T] Rashawn [Slater] who we drafted and [T] Storm Norton. As I told you yesterday, his wife just delivered. We have toughness in that group, and they're giving us a real chance to be successful. I'm really proud of that. We have to continue on that track because it doesn't get any easier as we go on. We're playing Baltimore this week, and they're an outstanding defense, too. You need that in the NFL up front. You need to have a tough group that plays together. Cleveland is as good a defense as we're going to play from a personnel standpoint."

On the team buying into the mission statement:

"Confidence is critical in every walk of life. You earn it every single day you're out there. When you're at the game and it's happening for you, that's when you can create even more belief. Most people see better than they hear, and I think our guys have been ready for those situations. They've performed really well because of that because they've been prepared. We haven't flinched in some of those big moments, and I feel like that's what we're trying to create in that competitive environment. Our players deserve all the credit for everything that's happening on the field because they're the ones making the plays. They're the ones executing with 80-thousand people screaming at them. What we've done is come together as a team. It's been every phase of the game, too. It hasn't just been the defense or the offense. In all these games, we've executed as a team to come back. That's really critical and these games have all been very different. And that's big, too, because you have to play the game the way it needs to be played, not the way you want it to be played. That's what we're doing and we're just ready for the tough stuff. That's what I say, 'We're going to be ready for the tough stuff.' The teams what we're playing are real, and the one that we're playing this week is really, really good. That's just life in the NFL. The more prepared you are for it to be like this, the better. Hopefully, that'll help us down the road."

CORNERBACK CHRIS HARRIS JR**On fourth-down conversions:**

"It's something we've been practicing, even in training camp. Preparing to go for it on fourth down, believing in the offense, believing in [QB Justin] Herbert to make the right decision, to spread the ball around. We feel like we can convert. We had that confidence in the offense and in the play calls that we can execute on fourth down. That's something that [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley put in our minds early before the season; that we were going to do that so it's something we've been ready for."

On the decision-making process when fourth-down opportunities arise.

"We're not surprised. We know that if we have good field position and a good chance at fourth-and-three, fourth-and-medium, we have a chance to get it. We feel we're capable to do it. We're confident, and it seems like we're going to do this all year."

On the Browns' run game:

"They have a good running attack, that's probably the best duo with [RB Kareem] Hunt and [RB Nick] Chubb. We had a couple poor tackles we need to clean up. But those guys have a dynamic run game, and that's something we need to improve before we see those boys again."

On the strength of Browns RB Nick Chubb:

"Chubb and [Browns RB Kareem] Hunt, and then it's the Cowboys next. With [Cowboys RB Ezekiel] Zeke [Elliott] and [RB Tony] Pollard, that was a tough duo, too. We've had a real schedule; we've played really lead teams. These running attacks have been tough."

On his shoulder injury:

"We were in man-coverage against The Washington Football Team. I was covering my man, and as I'm running, he ran a dig and I got blasted in the back of my scapula. I had a friendly fire just blasting me. I was supposed to be out six weeks, I was able to come back. I really could've come back against the Raiders, but we thought it would be smarter to come back and not play two games in a week. Get me back in the fold. Now I feel 100 percent, I feel good. I just had a freak accident, I keep having freak accidents, friendly fires. But I'm good, and I'm ready to finish the season strong."

On his comfortability coming back from injury:

"I felt fine hitting and getting off blocks. I feel back to 100 percent, and now it's just getting back in the fold and seeing where I can make plays."

On Head Coach Brandon Staley:

“I’d say he’s similar to [Former Texans and Broncos Head Coach Gary] Kubiak with the way he manages the team, how he manages practices and things like that. But then he has personality like [Former Panthers, Broncos and Bears Head] Coach [John] Fox, being a player’s coach, being able to tell us the truth. He has a lot of different kinds of personalities from coaches I’ve had, and he’s doing a great job. Everyone’s bought into the program, and we’re just going to continue to believe in him and what we need to do every week to win.”

On stopping the Browns’ final drive:

“Honestly, I thought we were going to knee the ball. Either take a knee, or [QB] Justin Herbert would try and run around a little bit, then take a knee. That’s what I thought we were going to do. But that was a great play by the Browns to be able to put [RB Austin] Ekeler in the end zone and give their offense a chance to win the game. That’s something that’s a rare situation that happens in the NFL, where the defense actually wants you to score. We thought we were going to take a knee or try and waste more clock.”

On the structure of stopping the run:

“We did the same thing; we just made plays and made the right tackles. A lot of it is self-inflicting issues. What we have to do is know where guys are going to be fitting up the run. Really just coming down and making tackles. As a man, we have to make tackles. These are great running backs, but we still need to be able to come down and make those tackles. I think we had a high level of mistackles this game with the yards after contact. That’s something we need to clean up.”

On Staley’s in-game adjustments:

“We always come in with a game plan, but sometimes in the NFL, you need to be able to adjust on the fly. He’s been able to do that, make key challenge calls, key timeouts. He’s been huge for us. Sometimes, it can be hard as you’re trying to concentrate on the defense and then try to be a head coach. He’s been able to manage it solidly.”

On the growth of the defense:

“We’ve definitely grown. Yesterday was a step back for us, defensively. You don’t ever want to give up 40 points. But before those first four games, I thought we were solid. Keeping teams below their average on their points. We just have to get back to that this week, we have another tough battle against the Ravens. They’re going to pound the ball try to run the ball. They have a dynamic quarterback whose been throwing the ball and can also run the ball. It’s another challenge this week, another chance for us to prove we’re improving on defense and make those key turnovers that we’ve made these past couple weeks.”

On if facing Browns QB Baker Mayfield prepared the defense to face Ravens QB Lamar Jackson:

“We’ve already played [Chiefs QB Patrick] Mahomes, [Raiders QB Derek] Carr — he can be mobile, Baker. We’ve had a lot of opportunities against some mobile guys, but there’s nobody that can compare to Lamar Jackson and his mobility. The way he can run, and he has shakes, he’s not trying to take a slide. This will be a new dynamic at the quarterback position. And they play a lot of big personnel. They play 13, they play three tight ends. We saw that a lot yesterday, it was a goal-line football game. We’ll see that again this week with the Ravens.”

On the Ravens’ receiving core:

“A lot of teams have to play a lot of man. We’re going to play tons of man and try to contain [Ravens QB] Lamar Jackson from running. He’s been able to make the throws and he’s beating man coverage. That’s what I’m seeing — [Ravens WR Marquise] ‘Hollywood’ Brown has been able to take the top off defenses. He’s a guy that you have to know. But that’s what we’re used to; we play [Chiefs WR] Tyreek Hill, we play [Raiders WR Henry] Ruggs [III] we play a lot of speed receivers that do that. It’s just another one on our list.”

On winning close games:

“It shows us that we have the belief to win any type of game. Any type of way that teams want to play, we feel like we can play any style. If they want to pound and ground, we can play that type of game and still win a shootout. If it’s a close, tight-knit defensive game, we feel like we can win those games, too. Just having that confidence — knowing wherever the game falls, however high it goes, we know we can win. That’s huge for a team. Coming out fast early in the season is huge because it’s hard play catchup in the NFL. Especially in the AFC West.”

On improving the run defense:

“We have to improve that. I feel like we have a lot of people in the box. We have enough in the box to get it handled. It’s just on us to figure it out and make those plays. We just have to tackle better.”

On containing Jackson:

“We have great defensive line coaches and edge coaches that are definitely going to work on a great game plan to be able to contain him. Try to contain him as best as we can. We had a great rush plan with [Chiefs QB Patrick] Mahomes, and that helped us out. Hopefully, we can draw up another one with Lamar. It’s going to be tough. We know as defensive backs we’re going to have to cover a little bit longer. He’s going to try and pick up a couple first downs with his legs. That’s something you have to know going into the game.”

On S Derwin James Jr.:

“He was huge, he had a big-time game all over the field. He was the one guy that did make a lot of great tackles and didn’t miss too many. That was big for us, hopefully we don’t need him to have 17 tackles every game. We have a long, long season and we want to keep him healthy and not run down early in the season before we get to the big-time games at the end of the year. We definitely don’t want him to have 17 tackles again.”

On playing with James Jr. against the Browns:

“It was great getting me back in the fold with them. Figuring out how we’re going to be used together. That was a tough game, a different game compared to a lot of NFL games. 13 personnel, goal-line, smash-run football. That was a real goal-line game, smash-mouth game. It’ll be a lot different this week and, in the weeks, to come, not playing that particular style of offense.”

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.:

“It happens in the NFL where you make a couple tough plays, and you can get frustrated. But I think he’s been playing great. I love his attitude, his competitiveness. He hates to get beat and that’s how I was as a young pup. I like his competitive nature, he’s going to continue to grow, continue to get better. It’s nothing we sweat, in our DB room, we expect all of our guys to play and contribute. We encourage everybody and we cheer for everybody in our DB room. We know even the twos are capable of playing. We know that everybody in our room is capable of going out there and making plays for us.”

On his talks with Samuel Jr.:

“I tell him to stay in the game and stay focused. And he went back in and still played. You never know when your time is going to be called and he’s always going to be ready. When they took him out, he went on special teams and tried to contribute there, too. He wasn’t that type of rookie that was pouting. He went in the game and tried to impact in another way. I love his attitude, I love his competitive drive, and I think he has a bright future.”

On the Browns second quarter touchdown:

“It was a miscommunication. I was trying to get Nas’ [S Nasir Adderley] attention because we were all working together on that coverage. I couldn’t get his attention and then they quick-snapped us. It’s just communication errors, and something we’ll fix. He won’t make that mistake again.”

SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.:

“It was normal football stuff, heat of the moment. We all went out there and competed hard, we all want to win the game. There was just some stuff that happened on the sideline, I didn’t full get to see what happened. All I know is that he was upset, but that’s part of the game.”

On his tackles:

“I just wanted to get those guys on the ground. We knew all week, that was our motto; those backs are two of the best in the league that we’re going to face this year. My motto coming into the game that I needed to make open-field tackles and be able to line us back up if those guys were able to break out.”

On the run defense:

“We just have to be better. We have to be better on all three levels, including the secondary. We have to help those guys tackle, too, and knock guys back up front. It’s an overall effort, and we’re going to get better from it.”

On the defensive performance:

“Overall, stopping the run. It wasn’t like we weren’t out there trying or just loafing around. You have to give hats off; we played a great rushing team. That’s one of the best rushing teams we’re going to play this year. It’s no excuse, but we have to be better overall. Up front and then in the secondary, we have to come help those guys tackle.”

On fixing the run defense:

“It’s about whooping the man in front of you.”

On his thought process when rushing the quarterback:

“The ball is the issue. I really want the ball, but I want to be able to affect him a little bit, too. In that moment, I had to make a smart play and luckily I got the ball out.”

On when the offense goes for four down conversions:

“I’m fully confident in those guys. I see it every day, and I’ve been saying it since day one, I love [Quarterback Justin] 10 [Herbert]. And I love the guys that are in front of him, blocking. I know our receivers are going to get open, they just need one more opportunity to get the ball. You can see they’re stopping themselves. It would be a drop or something. It’s not that they can’t convert it, they just need one more down to do it. We’re very confident that they’re going to get the ball. One time, I didn’t even get up. I said, ‘We’re going to get this.’ And then the next time I said, ‘Okay.’ We got up and went to the sideline. But I was confident that we were going to get the first down.”

On shutting down the Browns to end the game:

“In the second half, I feel like we settled down more as a defense. Of course, they started passing the ball more. When they passed more, we had more success. That last drive, once we got the key stops that we needed to get off the field, we felt that no matter what happened at the beginning of the game, we still got the opportunity. Our offense is still keeping us in it to win the game. We just had to control the moment. Whatever happened before didn’t matter, because we knew in our minds that we were going to win the game. No matter what, we were winning the game.”