

Chargers Offseason Media Availability, Phase Two

Monday, May 15, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR DERRICK ANSLEY

On his transition to the role of Defensive Coordinator:

"It's been natural. We have a great staff. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley surrounded us with really good men, guys that have been in the league for a long time. We have a good mix of youth with the young guys, as well, so it's been natural."

On the rookie class of defensive players:

"Those guys had a really good two days of Rookie Minicamp. They're all eager. They're all in the hotel living in now, but if the rules would have allowed them to stay in the facility, they would be here, too [laughter]. We like those kids. All of them have a unique skillset. We're looking for good things."

On OLB Tuli Tuipulotu's age and how that impacts his experience:

"He's young by age, but he's not young by wisdom. He's one of those old souls, he's all football. He's trying to find the extra things that are going to help his game. He's going to be fine that way. The older he gets, I think, those things will help, but his mentality is opportune, for sure."

On the addition of LB Eric Kendricks and what Kendricks brings to the unit:

"Experience, for one. Leadership, he has been there and done that. He has seen a lot of ball, played a lot of ball. He's been a calming presence for the room over the first two weeks of Phase Two."

On Kendricks' traits:

"I think that it's a combination of both. Our defense is similar to what he has played in, so the learning curve will not be that drastic. He's a guy that picks up things quickly, he's a down-hill type of guy, but he's equally as versatile versus the pass. All of our pattern-match responsibilities are things that he has done in the past. We expect him to be up-and-running pretty quick."

On areas of focus over the offseason program for the defense:

"We have our blueprint: Killing blocks, tackle and takeaways. Really, we just want to focus on doing our job, doing our job to the best of our ability, playing team defense, running to the ball, all of the intangible things that we control."

On additional points of emphasis when building off of last season:

"I think that every year you have to focus on tackling, turnovers and killing blocks. We want everybody to do their job, know their assignment inside and out, so that there are reactions."

On CB J.C. Jackson and how the secondary group will be arranged:

"He's here every day. He's been grinding for three, four months straight here, so it's been good having him in the building and getting him around his teammates. He's been doing a phenomenal job with his rehab. He's chomping at the bit. There's really no timetable or timeline for his return, but he's in here every day trying to get himself ready to go for the fall. With the combination, we'll see how that all works out. We're always trying to train defensive backs, not specialize guys or pigeon-hole them. We have four or five guys that are working at Star, four or five guys working at Money, which we value as starters. We'll see how that combination works out as we get to camp."

On the traits that CB Asante Samuel Jr. possesses that are suitable for Star:

"He definitely has the skillset to succeed. He has really good instincts, really good balance and body control. He can communicate and plays well with others inside. He has a unique skillset that he can play inside and out, which is why we drafted him."

On areas in which the unit can improve on run defense based off of last season's film evaluation:

"I think it is a combination of all three levels not being tied together. Missed tackles was definitely an issue, run rotation, getting those big runs knocked down. We're going to focus on those things in camp, getting those guys to the point of attack to make those plays."

On his level of confidence in improvement in the run game:

"Very confident, very confident. We have a good group in our room. Everybody knows what they need to do to perform at a high level in a job. It's our job, as coaches, to make sure that we get that done."

On the depth at safety:

"Good competition. We have competition at every spot in the secondary, especially safety. You have Derwin James [Jr.], who can play multiple spots. You have Alohi [Gilman] that has played a lot of ball around here. You have JT [Woods], we have a lot of expectations for him this year. It's going to be a really competitive group. Mark Webb [Jr.] is in that mix, Michael Jacquet, Raheem Layne. That group is very competitive. A lot of different skillsets in that group, which is what you need at safety."

On adjustments to his responsibility and working with Staley:

"There's a little bit of change, me overseeing the defense with him and making sure that we're all aligned and working in the same direction. It's just getting in wherever I need to be at, whether that's with the defensive line, those guys on the edge, or the inside linebackers. Not a drastic change, day-to-day within the environment, but there are some things that I can do that affect the whole group."

On added responsibilities:

"Presentations in the installation meetings. Being in different rooms, not just being with the secondary all of the time. Implementing my personality into some of those groups, which I think we can do going forward."

On his personality:

"Aggressive, calm. I'm whatever our players need me to be. Some guys need the rah-rah, some guys need you to be calm. I'm adjustable; whatever the players need from me, that's what I'll do."

On S JT Woods:

"Secondary play, we kind of break it into three phases — 1, 2 and 3 — and the 3 part is the deep part of the field. He has the speed to get to all of those places. He can get there at a very high rate and at a very easy clip. We think that he has rare speed. He has really good instincts. Great ball skills in the deep part of the field. Those things are going to really help compliment whoever is playing inside."

On the importance of vision for a safety and if Woods possesses those traits:

"I think that JT can see. When you look at the fall and you go through our practices from week-to-week, he's getting a lot of reps and he has made a lot of plays on the ball. We saved all of those clips for him, same thing he did at Baylor. To answer your question, he can definitely see at a high level and he has the speed to get to those places."

SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR RYAN FICKEN

Opening statement:

"Just to open it up, I'm really excited about the guys. Not only about our current players on the roster, I think I'm really excited actually about the young talent that we're bringing in here. We're looking for some good competition. We're ready to kick off this offseason here next week with the practices. With that, I'll go ahead and open it up."

On WR Derius Davis:

"There's a lot that he brings to the table. That's why we were drawn to him. Obviously, his speed is a given. You see that coming off on the tape. The way he catches the ball, he has the ability to go ahead and catch. As a punt returner, with his mechanics, he does a great job. Also, being a dual returner. The success that he had gives our team a lot of opportunities to go ahead and have some big plays in those return phases, which we're excited about. Like I told him going through this whole process, he has to go ahead and earn this position. Nothing is going to be handed to him. We have some guys that are capable that can go ahead and do it on the roster, as well. He's also competing with other guys throughout the league, but he's excited for that challenge."

On Davis' size contributing to his return ability:

"That's a great question, but he has the speed and athleticism to make guys miss. He's a slippery returner. You don't really get a full hit on the guy, but there have been some guys his size and even smaller that I've been fortunate to go ahead and coach, such as [former Vikings CB] Marcus Sherels in Minnesota who's 5-7 and even smaller than him, who's had a lot of success. He's just a good football player that has the ability to go ahead and be dynamic with the ball in his hands. That's what we're excited about. His speed and athleticism drew us, but also the way he commanded the situations and his catch mechanics really made it an easy decision."

On finding a dual returner in the draft:

"It is rare, but I'll say, especially the way the college game is now — they don't catch as many punts anymore. A lot of hit and rolls. A lot of times, you don't see them returning. The success that he was able to have catching those punts at that level and returning was really attractive for us. As a dual returner, especially with the kickoff return the way that it's going in college right now, you don't have those returns. We're very fortunate to be able to land him as a dual returner. We're excited for him to be able to compete for both of those positions."

On the biggest challenge for a returner coming into the NFL:

"I'll say the speed of everything. You have linebackers, you have some edge guys in some situations that can run almost as fast as you. You have running backs covering down there that are good athletes. You're not necessarily always the best athlete on the field. I would also say the way the punters punt at this level. You don't have these traditional punters — there's very few of them at the college level. Being able to catch an NFL punt — our punter, for instance, kicks them [with hangtime of] 5.3, 5.4, 5.5 [seconds]. Then, having the bodies at your feet right there, it's a little different catching those. We're excited about what he can do and watch what the other returners on the roster can go ahead and bring to the table."

On a kicker competition with K Cameron Dicker and K Dustin Hopkins:

"I'm excited. They had a great year, both of them. Obviously, Dustin was doing a great job before he went ahead and had the misfortune of getting injured. That's how every roster is structured. You want to have that competition at every position. That's what's exciting because [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley and [General Manager] Tom [Telesco], they've structured the roster exactly that way, and that's what brings out the best in these guys. I'm really excited. They've done a great job the last couple of weeks. We're going on our third week of Phase Two. Really, they start kicking in front of the team just so they can show the work that they've been putting into this offseason so they can go ahead and compete and win that battle."

On assessing kickers:

"I think it all goes into the evaluation process, for sure. I think that it's very important, what they've done in the past, and where they are right now — the body of work. Also, how they're working with their teammates. Obviously, the success that they're currently having. You can't put too much emphasis on what they've done in the past because they are different, it's been a year now — good and bad. Some guys take huge leaps and bounds from previous years. My first year in Minnesota, we had a competition, as well. I'm just excited about those guys because they handle it as true pros. They're really eager to go ahead and compete for that job.

"I think, for us, it's the consistency. The ball flight, making sure there's consistent ball flight. It's easy to chart the made kicks — good and no good kicks. The consistency with that. I know you want to have the leg strength, that's all part of it, obviously, but that's not the end all be all. We're looking for a complete kicker that can handle all mid-range. The majority of the field goals are coming inside of 50 yards to begin with. We have to make sure we're consistent and we can go ahead and make those kicks. Then have the ability if need be to do 50-plus yarders, to go ahead and connect on those as well. We're looking for that consistent kicker."

On P JK Scott:

"I was very excited [for him to come back]. I think the whole organization was, too. We're very fortunate to be able to bring him back, have the organization support him. He believes in the organization, too. We feel he had a really good year, but he complemented our unit and what we were trying to achieve as a unit. You saw the success that we were able to have. Again, the success that we had last year — you talk about field goals, punt returning, punting and these situations — all of that now is behind us. It's now what can we do moving forward? We have a higher standard now for us, and we have to go out there, work and compete again."

On LB Daiyan Henley:

"He showed a lot [of special teams ability in college]. I was actually really excited about him. He was our top core guy, out of all positions that we wanted to bring in. We're very fired up about him. What impressed me the most about him is that he was a starter on defense, and yet he was still able to make a huge impact on special teams. He takes a lot of pride in that, which I thought was great. When we met him when he came in for his top-30 visit, I introduced myself and the first thing he said was, 'Have you seen my special teams tape?' That's really exciting. Again, he's another guy just like everyone else. They have to come in and earn those positions. We won't just hand them out to them. They have to make their impact felt. That's what I'm excited about seeing him do this spring."

On Henley's biggest strength:

"I would say his athleticism and then his strength. He's a very good football player. If you're talking about the specific punt and all of that stuff — punt he's going to have to learn a little bit more in terms of punt because it's a little bit of a different system than what he's coming from in college. This guy is a football player. That's what I try and instill in these guys coming from college. They're running backs, receivers or whatever position they are — they're not a running back when they get into the NFL. You're a football player. That's what we have to make sure that they understand. How can I increase my value to be able to get onto the field and help this football team win a lot of football games?"

On if Henley could play gunner:

"You know, anything's possible with this guy because he has good athleticism. We have a couple of good gunners, but never know what happens with those situations and positions. Again, that's part of it. If you can go ahead and find a way to increase your value, that's playing a lot of different positions in a lot of different phases, that only helps you in the long run, in terms of staying here and making an impact on this team."

On entering year two as the team's special teams coordinator:

"I wouldn't say comfortable would be the word for me because we're always going to have a sense of urgency in what we do. Last year doesn't mean anything. Moving forward, we didn't do enough to go ahead and win the games and get the Super Bowl trophy here. At the end of the day, I'm very excited about this group. I understand some of what these players are and what they're made of, the veterans that have been here. I had to utilize them a little bit and put them in better situations to be successful, so that part I feel very comfortable. Other than that, no, we're starting from scratch, day one. We have to make sure we pump up the urgency and get the most out of all of these guys, even the guys that were here last year and the young guys in here coming forward."

On consistency last season:

"I'm not sure with years past and all of that, but I was just excited for the players and see them have success and really see how they went and embraced special teams. It was all the players. The way they went ahead and approached their business and the way they went around their work, and how important it was for them to go ahead and make an impact for this team was fun to watch. I was happy for them with seeing the success that they had. They're very hungry and very eager to go ahead and get back out there, and continue to get better. Now, there is no surprise. We are who we are right now. We have to go out there and prove on a daily basis that we're one of the best teams out there. We have to make sure we continue to help our team win."

DEFENSIVE LINEMAN SEBASTIAN JOSEPH-DAY

On his offseason:

"Offseason has been good. It's been fun to get away. I think, at least for me, the last game has really been on my mind a lot; how well we did play and the potential we have. It's been a very eventful, hard-working offseason for me, personally, and I think that for a lot of guys."

On his emotion walking off of the field in Jacksonville:

"I look at it from both sides. You look at it as a point of how well we played that first half. Then, you see about, also, where we need to improve. It's like a dual thing, it's good and bad, because you see where we can go and the potential that's there when we put it all together. It's about the consistency now and putting it all together. I think, also, that comes with everyone playing together, everyone – [OLB] Khalil Mack, me, [CB] J.C. [Jackson], [DL] Morgan [Fox], [LB] Kenneth Murray [Jr.]. Last year was the first time that we all can you give us a team. We have a lot of younger guys – Zont [CB Asante Samuel Jr.] Vato [CB Michael Davis], other people in the backfield – that kind of were playing together for the first time. I feel like, this year, that chemistry was built. I feel like chemistry is built through trials and tribulations and I really believe that that really is going to shape us in a way better way moving forward."

On the potential of the team in 2023:

"I think that we can go as far as we want to go. At the end of the day, we proved to everyone that we can go as far as we want to go. The only people that are stopping us are us. That's why I'm very excited for this year and a lot of people are excited for this year."

On Fox re-signing with the team:

"I was very excited. That's my dog. I've been playing with Fox now, this is going to be Year 6, I think, of playing with him? Morgan is my dog, man. It's easy playing with him. I know what he is thinking, he knows what I'm thinking. Not much needs to be said out there. It definitely helps."

On if he had a prior relationship with Kendricks and his early impressions of Kendricks:

"Obviously, Eric is one of the top linebackers in the league for a while now. What he has done on the field has been phenomenal. I think what is awesome about him is that all of the things that you've heard about him off of the field, you know what type of guy he is, but everything that I've seen stands true. He's a hard worker. He puts his nose down and gets to work. He's smart. Super excited to play ball with him to see the football side."

On the value of experience and leadership behind him at linebacker:

"It helps a lot. It just brings a calmness to it. I think communication is probably just the biggest thing, especially as a D-lineman. We are in charge of certain things, but there are certain things that we cannot see because, at a certain point, we have our head down. I think having Eric [Kendricks] back there is going to definitely help us make those adjustments faster, less wasted time, less thinking. He will be able to see that faster and get it communicated to us. That will help, honestly, everyone play faster. At the end of the day, you can't play defense slow. The moment you're a step behind or you miss something, that's how you get got. It's definitely going to help us, for sure."

On 'not letting the loss to Jacksonville consume him or the team':

"It does consume me, though. I think that's the part about it. I think that if you're a competitor and you want to be great – I'm not speaking for anyone else, I'm speaking for me, like that consumes me. The way that we lost, I've never lost like that before. I think the closest I've ever lost like that was probably 2020 versus the Green Bay Packers at Lambeau [Field], but even that way, it was like a battle, kind of back-and-forth, back-and-forth, and we just kind of bended and broke a little bit. The way that we lost, I've never lost like that before. That really, at least for me, really made me think about myself as a player, what I could do better, how I could be a better leader, how I could have helped make extra play. It just, honestly, lit a fire under me. I'm pretty sure that a lot of guys are wired that way, a lot of guys in the organization are wired that way. It definitely lit a fire under a lot of guys. I think you need that, honestly, as a competitor, because at the end of the day, this is a job, but this is our livelihood. I love playing this game. I don't go out each and every day, putting my body on the line, to lose, especially when you're up 27-0, right? If it doesn't bother you, then something is wrong. If it doesn't consume you, something's wrong or you don't love this game enough."

On using the loss to Jacksonville as a positive:

"In your approach, re-evaluating yourself as a player. You re-evaluate what you need to work on and improve on, the way you train, how hard to go. Honestly, I just think, no matter what, it's always going to be that thing behind your back that pushes you to never let whatever your part is in this team sport, whatever your part is, to make sure that you never allow yourself to let your teammates down or the man next to you down. At the end of the day, you never want to feel that feeling again."

On if he has met OLB Tuli Tuipulotu yet and what he can teach Tuipulotu:

"Yes. Really nice guy. He's an outside linebacker, so there's not really much that I can teach him besides the communication aspect. I just met him today, he seems like a real good kid. He's real quiet, real nice. He has a great room. He is going to be in a room with [OLB] Khalil Mack, [OLB] Joey Bosa. You can't ask for a better situation. It was kind of like me in my rookie year when I was in with AD [Rams DL Aaron Donald] and [former NFL DL Ndamukong] Suh. I think that he is going to be just fine in that room [laughter]."

On helping the rookie class understand the team's culture:

"The mentality – grit, tough and rugged football. That's what we're trying to instill here and that's what we will instill here. That's the mindset. That's the culture here that we're building. It's just hard-nosed, getting your nose bloody, down-in and down-out football players, and that's it."

On where he has witnessed the 'culture change':

"I've definitely seen a change, for sure. What [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley is building here is tremendous. A lot of it goes to Coach Staley, shoutout to him. He's been really adamant of bringing that culture here and, in free agency, bringing in the guys that he wanted to bring. I've definitely seen it change over the year and the way that he wants it. I've seen another shift again from first time that I was here to now. We're definitely trending towards the right direction."

On aspects of the culture change:

"The comradery, because now we're all used to one another, I think that we're all used to one another after we've had another year with everyone being around each other. I think that pays dividends in any sport. I look at it like any other sport. It's like basketball, right? When you have a starting five that's playing for the first time, there aren't going to be no-look passes and stuff like that, but there are some times where guys are like, 'Oh, I wasn't expecting that.' It's the same thing. Football is the same exact thing. D-Line, it's the same exact thing. You have to cover each other up when you're pass-rushing. You have to be able to play off of each other when you're pass-rushing. You have to know how this guy rushes. I know that Morgan [Fox] is more of a finesse guy, so then I can't be as finesse-y either. That's how those things kind of play out. Even in the run, if I'm taking my shot and I'm shooting the gap, I know that K9 [Kenneth Murray Jr.] is going to come and make me right, even though I may be in the wrong gap, but I took a shot. Stuff like that, I think that just comes with experience and knowing the players you play around. I feel like that's what we're building and that's what we have now because everyone has seen how each other plays. I think that's the biggest thing, the cohesion that's coming together."

On DL Austin Johnson returning from injury:

"Very encouraging. A.J. is a big part of this defense and he will be moving forward. I'm super excited to have him back, especially the injury that he went through. His mental toughness, to be able to persevere what he went through, it's nothing but a credit to him. Super excited."

On WR Keenan Allen appearing on The Masked Singer:

"That was super dope. I thought that it was cool. He went on there, did his thing. I thought that it was hilarious how Robin Thicke thought that it was Joey Bosa [*laughter*]. I was like, 'What? No shot.' [*Laughter*] Keenan did his thing."

On if he had heard Allen sing before the appearance on television:

"I've heard him sing a couple of times, humming some tunes and stuff like that. I honestly didn't even know that he was like a singer singing though until about midway through the year. I would hear him humming some tunes. For some reason something came up about his music and I was like, 'Oh, wow, he actually makes music. This is dope.' He did his thing, for sure."

On the 'biggest difference' toward improvement in the run defense:

"I think that the biggest difference is everyone being on the same page. I think us having that experience together, because now everyone knows what excitation is, I think having Eric [Kendricks] here, as well, it's definitely going to help with the communication on things. At the end of the day, it's just coming together as a team and using those experiences, learning from last year and the mistakes that we made, because run defense is everyone. I feel like a lot of people don't really know – some people are like, 'Oh, it's the D-line.' It's everyone, it really is everyone, and it's a mindset. I think that having Eric back there is really going to help with the mindset, help with the communication, help with people getting in the right spots faster by dissecting what he sees."

On Ansley's transition to Defensive Coordinator:

"It's been great. He has this calm urgency about him that I really enjoy. It's intense, but it's calm. It's really interesting. I really like his mentality. He's bringing a new energy. I think that it's everything that we need right now. We need to be able to stay calm, but also have urgency to be able to do our job. I like it."