

Chargers Offseason Media Availability, Phase One

Monday, April 17, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the beginning of the offseason program:

"It's been 93 days since our last ball game, so we're ready to get started. It's good to see everybody here. There's a different energy when players get back. We're excited to start doing football."

On his message to the team regarding participation in the offseason program:

"It's certainly optional, that's the way that the collective bargaining agreement is right now. We're really appreciative of the guys who are here. Your players set the culture of your team and we want to create competition in the springtime to improve as a football team. We're excited about the guys who are here and we're looking forward to the next couple of months."

On what LB Eric Kendricks 'brings to the defense':

"A lot of experience, a lot of play-making ability. He's been at the heart of one of the top defenses in the NFL his entire career. He's a very complete player and he's also one of the best leaders that you're going to be around. I'm excited about joining up with him. We're going to have a lot of work ahead of us."

On the 'positive turnout' today:

"I'm just proud of our players, proud of the culture that we have on our football team and the leadership of our football team. Today's day one of it, but we have a team that I'm really excited to coach."

On if he is 'encouraged' by DL Oton Ogbornia's recovery process:

"Yes, definitely. He's working hard."

On developing his plan for the remainder of the offseason and into next season:

"I think you start brand new each and every season. I don't think that you ever take anything for granted. I think you truly have to build a team each and every year. I think where that starting point is can be a little bit different, depending on how many people you bring back, but there's just so much transition in the NFL – whether it's with players or coaches or staff – you have to reset your team every single year and build it. Today's the first day, kind of, of that process. I think you have a lot better understanding of the calendar, of the rhythm, that you're trying to create, the teaching progression of everything and truly how to build a football team, and how long of a season it really is, starting from the spring season all the way to your final game. You have a much better understanding of how to do that, the more you do this. As a coach, this is a really special time, that teaching time of the springtime, and being able to build your football team. Certainly, the draft is coming up next week and you get a bunch of new guys there too, but this is a really great time for coaches."

On an update regarding CB J.C. Jackson's recovery process:

"Same as before. He's working really hard. It's been great that he's been doing his rehab here. Just excited to see his progress here, now that we're all back together, and try to take advantage of these next two months before we hit break."

On 'if anything has changed with where things stand' regarding RB Austin Ekeler:

"No updates on Austin. Same comments as before."

On QB Justin Herbert's recovery process:

"Progressing well."

On if Herbert is in attendance today:

"He is."

On if it is 'up in the air' that Herbert will participate in later phases of the offseason program:

"Yeah, up in the air. We're going to listen to the doctors. I know that he's making progress. We'll have those updates as we get closer to practice time."

On 'if an update is available' regarding Herbert and contract extension negotiations:

"No update. We're going to keep those negotiations private. Looking forward to just getting started with Phase One."

On the status of kickoff and punt returner currently:

"We're really appreciative of Dre [DeAndre Carter]. He was fantastic for us and excited that he has an opportunity with Las Vegas. We're really grateful for all of his contributions. Like I've said on some other guys, too, that's the tough side of things, but I'm really grateful for our relationship and wishing him nothing but success. We're going to have to look into that returner space here in the next months, whether it's springtime or in the summer, and that will be a position that we need to evaluate."

On if he is 'approaching this offseason any differently' than previous offseasons:

"No, I think you're just trying to build a football team. I think you get better at as you go. We have tremendous players, tremendous coaches, personnel department, ownership. I think you're able to see this thing take shape the longer that you do it. I'm excited to attack this offseason and improve my game, improve our football team and build ourselves ready for training camp."

On how he spent the past three months:

"I spent a lot of time with my family. That's number one. That's the most important thing to me, making sure that I pour into my three sons and my wife and my brothers and make sure that we make a lot of memories. There's a lot to catch up on in being involved in their school and their games. That's where my focus has been. Then, just looking inward about where I can improve with my own game and making sure that I was ready for these players today because we want to make sure that every time we get a chance to be in front of them – you don't get a chance to be in front of them as much anymore, so when you do get that chance to be in front of them, that you're ready for them and that you've shown them what you've done to invest in your game, and that we've been watching their game, most importantly. It's like, 'Hey, we have a plan for you. In the springtime, we have a gameplan that you can really work on to help yourself get ready for training camp.'"

On his 'overall thoughts on potentially trading back from the No. 21 overall pick':

"I think it depends on how the draft board takes shape. I think that a big determining factor. Those 16, 18 players that you have deemed – maybe, if that's what it is – and how that draft board expresses itself. Then, what you feel like your odds are of being able to move back and what that gains you. I think those things are sort of ongoing on Draft Day, and you won't know until Draft Day, but you're always trying to increase your probability. Sometimes that's the input, sometimes that's going up or going back. I think it's case-by-case. But, there will be a good player for us to choose. I think that that's what we're committed to, is just choosing a player that we all believe in and that we know that there's a role for him and that there's a vision for his path within his time as a Charger. An exciting time for us. Looking forward to next week."

On connecting with Offensive Coordinator Kellen Moore:

"Great to team up with him. So much respect from afar. Getting to work with him on a day-to-day basis, you're just able to improve a lot as a coach. I think we're able to make each other's game better. I know how much he's going to help our football team, not just our offense. It's been great to see how he sees the football game, what his plan of attack is, the vision he has for playing offensive football, and the all the experiences that he's had, both as a player and as a coach. I really respect those experiences. I think we can really leverage all of them to form a new way here with the Chargers, a way that we really believe in. I think that's the thing about being with him is that he fits the way that we want to play as a football team, and it's not just about offensive football. He has a great feel of how to fit in to the team aspect of playing and knowing how to utilize the team in front of them and how that fits into the greater scope of things. I've really appreciated that. He's a winner. I think that that's something that was very attractive to me, as you go back to his days as a high school player, of playing for his father, to Boise [State] to his time in the NFL, as a player and as a coach. They've been very, very good wherever he's gone. I'm excited for him to bring all of those experiences to the Chargers and for us to team up. He's been fantastic for our staff. Now, I'm excited for our players to get to be in front of them every day."

On Kendricks' leadership abilities and the role that plays at linebacker:

"I think the intangible part of that position is that you're truly connecting both places, you're connecting the front of your defense to the back of your defense. You're in the middle of everything. In the NFL, any time that you play a position that's in the middle – inside linebacker, safety, quarterback, center – any time that you're in the middle, you have to be a connector. That's part of your value to the football team that goes far beyond height, weight, speed. As good of a player as he is, the fact that he has that type of leadership capacity multiplies his impact on the team. What he did in Minnesota, I got to witness firsthand because I was in the division when I was in Chicago, and played him when I went to Denver and played him as a head coach here. Some of my best friends have been a part of coaching him. Watching him from afar, just the level of respect that I've had for him, not just as a player, but as a leader – Walter Payton Man of the Year, you're talking about the highest caliber that you could join up with. You get some of these special players that have all that – a [OLB] Khalil Mack, [S] Derwin James [Jr.], these guys that are fantastic, premium players that also have the fantastic, premium leadership stuff. We felt like he would bring a lot to our culture. Excited to get to work with him."

On if he 'pours himself' into preparing for the draft:

"Oh yeah, pour yourself into the draft, pour yourself into the players. There's no bigger investment that you make as a club than who you bring into your football team. You have to have as much knowledge of that player as possible and you have to have as many viewpoints as possible. I love the draft since I was a little kid. I've told you the story. I grew up watching the draft, the Staley Family was watching every pick in the draft from as long as I can remember. Now, you get a chance to be a part of that selection process. You want to dive into to that process full steam. We take a lot of pride in the level of detail that we have in this process. Joining up with our scouting department, which who was fantastic, led by you [General Manager] Tom [Telesco], [Director of Player Personnel] JoJo [Wooden], [Director of College Scouting] Kevin Kelly, the scouts, just that teamwork, that aspect of bringing people together and studying these guys, getting to meet these players. It's a tremendous process. Next week is going to be exciting for the Chargers."

On re-signing DL Morgan Fox:

"Foxy, who is back there in a bucket hat right now [*laughter*]. He's going to be up here next talking, so I better get done quickly. Foxy, number one, he represents our culture. He represents everything that we want in a football player, but then in terms of what he can do, he has versatility in the front to play a lot of different places. Then, he brings something that's hard to find in the NFL, which is interior pass rush. He has real sack production. When you have an interior pass rusher that can rush like he can, it gives you an advantage. He knows how to rush as part of a team, which is important when you have to quality outside rushers like we have. He understands how to fit within a rush plan. He's the guy that makes plays for us and represents who we want to be, from a culture standpoint."

LINEBACKER ERIC KENDRICKS

On returning to Southern California to join the Chargers:

"It feels good. Today, it was like I was the new kid in school. It was a little bit nerve-wracking for me. It feels good."

On if he knew anybody in the locker room before signing with the Chargers:

"I've met people, but didn't really know anybody on that level. Not yet. I'm looking forward to building those relationships and things like that. I've obviously played against a lot of people. Familiarity-wise, that's why I'm here, so I can get to know all of the players and build that camaraderie."

On building relationships:

"Just lifting, running and shooting the [breeze] on the side. Do little things like that. Not do too much, just be myself and come in here and just learn."

On OLB Khalil Mack:

"I remember just seeing him from the sideline and seeing how big he was, and just being like, 'How do you even get that big just from genetics?' I'm glad he's on my team, now. I don't have to worry about that anymore?"

On what attracted him to sign with the Chargers:

"Honestly, they're a good team. They're contenders, they have a good quarterback, a great coaching staff. Just having conversations with [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley, I think the first time we talked, we maybe talked for an hour and a half. It was 11 o'clock at night and I got to know his personality a lot. I'm glad that I can fit into this program, into this system, but also, I don't have to do too much as I come in. I can get to know the guys, get to know the leaders on the team, like Khalil, and things like that and just play my role. This is my ninth year in the league. I've seen a lot. I've done a lot. Hopefully, my experiences can help everybody else around me. Like I said, I'm not pushing for that. I'm just going to come in here, be myself and play the game that I love to play."

On his conversation with Head Coach Brandon Staley:

"Honestly, that whole time period was kind of hectic for me. I just know that we had a great conversation among tons of conversations that I had, but it definitely stuck with me."

On playing in the Chargers defense:

"I don't want to talk about Minnesota a lot, but it's a big part of my past. I was there for eight years. It was a big deal. I think that coming to the Chargers, especially being around a bunch of great players, it's going to bring another level to my game. It's going to make me feel like I'm the underdog again. I'm back to the bottom of the totem pole. I have to prove myself to everybody — my new teammates and things like that. Like I've said, I'm not going to do too much. I'm not going to put too much pressure on myself, but it's my natural personality to feel that way."

On the defensive scheme:

"When I signed, we went into the room and I was talking to the head man and determined a lot of terms. Obviously, the same coverages and things like that. There is a lot of crossover. My wife was with me, she probably was thinking that it sounded like a different a language based on how we were talking. A lot of familiarity. I'm excited to go into my second year into this scheme. Last year, I thought I played well and did a lot of good things, but in the same breath, I think that year two in the system, I'm going to have a bigger edge. I'm going to know things that can harm us in certain situations, things that I know that could help us. Hopefully, we can go from there."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.:

"We went to Formula Drift together. They drift cars. I don't know if anybody is familiar with that, but it's a lot of fun. It was last weekend in Long Beach. So, we went to Formula Drift together. I know he's a big car guy, I'm a big car guy. I don't care about anything else, he's a good guy for me in that sense. We're big car guys. The football stuff, obviously, that's our first love and passion. I'm sure that will take care of itself. The fact that we can hang out in a different setting and kind of unwind and be personable with each other on that level is going to be great for us."

On his leadership:

"Like I've said, my goal is not to do too much. Not try to overextend. Just do what I've done my whole career. I feel like I came into UCLA kind of as the underdog in the same situation, not really knowing anybody. I'm just kind of taking that approach, just like when I was a rookie — put my head down and work. Do things that I'm good at and we'll go from there."

DEFENSIVE LINEMAN MORGAN FOX

On re-signing with the Chargers:

"It's really exciting. I'm excited to be back with staff, with the guys, first and foremost. We have a great room across the board; offense, defense. I just love being around the guys. Being around them, seeing all the work we put in, we're trying to go a little farther than we did. Being back with a staff that believes in you and believes in the team is awesome."

On producing a 'career year' last season and what he attributes that to:

"Just having a great room, being around a great staff that knows how to put you in the right position. And, at the end of the day, gives you the opportunities that you need to make plays. We have a ton of guys that make plays. You just have to see where you fit into that scheme and where you can help out. Coach Staley and the other coaches put me in good positions and give me a ton of opportunities to make plays. That's something that I really appreciate and attribute to being able to have a bounce-back year. Then, just the guys that I play with, the caliber of players that we have from front to back, it's kind of easy to go in there and do your job and make plays."

On returning to the Chargers:

"I wanted to be here. Like I said, I love the guys, I love the coaches, I love the area, I love the fans. It's really hard not to enjoy just being here, in general. Being able to have the opportunities that are presented to me with the coaching staff and just being able to play with the caliber of players that we have, it's really, really enticing to stay back here. I really wanted to be back here and help go take this team in the direction that we're all trying to go in."

On experiencing success in this defensive scheme:

"Like I said earlier, it's opportunities. Coach Staley believes in me and he gives me opportunities to go make plays. That's something that he's always done, every year that I've been with him, is just a plethora of opportunities. He puts me in positions to win and believes in my abilities to win. I can't do anything but attribute to guys around me, as well. I have nothing but great players to play off of, to play with, from top to bottom on the roster. It definitely makes it a lot easier to make plays when you're around guys like that and are given the opportunities that the coaches gave you."

On discussion amongst the players regarding how last season ended:

"There was a lot of talk about it. The first couple of weeks, really frustrated, kind of venting, getting it out; what happened, what we could have done better. Then, you have to see it everywhere you go. Every bar you go into, it's on the TV every. Then, like you said, you get back to talking about what do we do to get better? This is motivation to see that and have to hear about it and basically go make it right, because at the end of the day, we have to address it, acknowledge that it happened, but move on and go make a new name for ourselves. It's a new season, so kind of flush all of that."

On Kendricks:

"He's awesome. We actually have a lot of mutual friends. Today was the first time that I've met him in person, but everyone that I know that knows him speaks very highly of him, nothing but great things about him. It was awesome to actually meet him today, get to work with him. I'm excited to see what the season is going to look like with him."

On 'the value of veteran players being in attendance':

"I think that there's a ton. I was really fortunate when I was young that all of the veterans that I had – really, really good vets, like Aaron [Donald] and [Michael] Brockers, they were all there when I was young. They showed up to OTAs, they showed up every year. I wanted to follow their example. I had veterans do that for me as a young guy, so I want to be able to be that veteran for other young guys and set the example. At the end of the day, we're all pushing toward the same goal, we're all trying to do the same thing. I figure that the longer we work together, the more we work, then it's going to make it a little easier to go that direction."