











LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

GAME RELEASE

PRESEASON WEEK 1 vs. LOS ANGELES **RAMS**

SAT. AUG. 14, 2021 | 7:00 PM PT

#BOLTUP

GAME RELEASE

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BOLTS BUILD UNDER BRANDON STALEY

The Los Angeles Chargers take on the Rams for the 38th time ever in the preseason, kicking off at 7:00 p.m. PT from SoFi Stadium. Spero Dedes, Dan Fouts and LaDainian Tomlinson have the call on KCBS while Matt "Money" Smith, Petros Papadakis and Shannon Farren will broadcast on the Chargers Radio Network airwaves on ALT FM-98.7. Adrian Garcia-Marquez and Francisco Pinto will present the game in Spanish on Que Buena FM 105.5/94.3.

The Bolts unveiled a new logo and uniforms in early 2020, and now will be unveiling a revamped team under new head coach, **Brandon Staley**. Staley, who served as the defensive coordinator for the Rams in 2020, will begin his first year as a head coach by playing against his former team in the first game of the preseason.

Reigning Offensive Rookie of the Year **Justin Herbert** looks to build off his 2020 season, where put forth a record-setting rookie campaign. He will still have weapons such as **Keenan Allen**, **Mike Williams** and **Austin Ekeler**, and will also have newly-signed TE **Jared Cook** to stretch the defense. Herbert will be playing behind a revamped offensive line, which includes three free agent signings — **Corey Linsley**, **Matt Feiler** and **Oday Aboushi** — and the addition of first-round rookie **Rashawn Slater**. The defense will again feature **Joey Bosa**, **Derwin James Jr.**, and **Kenneth Murray Jr.**

The Rams feature a new quarterback this year after trading for Matthew Stafford from the Detroit Lions this offseason. He put up 282 touchdowns and an 89.9 passer rating over 12 seasons in The Motor City. The Rams had the No. 1 defense in the NFL last season under new Chargers Head Coach Brandon Staley, and bring back defensive stars Aaron Donald, Jalen Ramsey and Leonard Floyd.

The Chargers will host San Francisco for joint practices leading up to their preseason matchup on Sun., Aug. 22. The game will be the lone home contest for the Bolts in the preseason before finishing the exhibition slate at Seattle on Sat., Aug. 28.

BY THE NUMBERS

37 The Chargers have played the Rams in the preseason 37 times and hold a 19-18 all-time advantage in the preseason series.

3 Under the new 17-game regular-season schedule format, the Bolts will play just three preseason games for the first time since 1995.

35 The Chargers roster boasts 35 new players from last season, including nine draft picks. The nine were the most selections by the Bolts in a single draft since picking 11 players in 2004.

ON THE CALL

TELEVISION: **KCBS**
Play-by-play: Spero Dedes
Analyst: Dan Fouts
Sideline: LaDainian Tomlinson

CHARGERS RADIO: **ALT FM-98.7**
Play-by-play: Matt "Money" Smith
Analyst: Petros Papadakis
Sideline: Shannon Farren

SPANISH RADIO: **QUE BUENA FM-105.5/94.3**
Play-by-play: Adrian Garcia-Marquez
Analyst: Francisco Pinto

CHARGERS MOBILE APP: Official team news, full game stats, live local Chargers games on the Chargers mobile app. For more details, visit Chargers.com/app.

**Geographic and device restrictions apply. Local & primetime games only. Data charges may apply.*

2021 CHARGERS SCHEDULE

PRESEASON (0-0)

Wk	Date	Opponent	TV	Time*/Res.
1	Sat., Aug. 14	at L.A. Rams	KCBS	7:00 p.m.
2	Sun., Aug. 22	SAN FRANCISCO	KCBS	4:30 p.m.
3	Sat., Aug. 28	at Seattle	KCBS	7:00 p.m.

REGULAR SEASON (0-0)

Wk	Date	Opponent	TV	Time*/Res.
1	Sun., Sept. 12	at Washington	CBS	10:00 a.m.
2	Sun., Sept. 19	DALLAS	CBS	1:25 p.m.
3	Sun., Sept. 26	at Kansas City	CBS	10:00 a.m.
4	Mon., Oct. 4	LAS VEGAS	ESPN	5:15 p.m.
5	Sun., Oct. 10	CLEVELAND	CBS	1:05 p.m.
6	Sun., Oct. 17	at Baltimore	CBS	10:00 a.m.
7	—	*BYE*	—	—
8	Sun., Oct. 31	NEW ENGLAND	CBS	1:05 p.m.
9	Sun., Nov. 7	at Philadelphia	CBS	1:05 p.m.
10	Sun., Nov. 14	MINNESOTA	FOX	1:05 p.m.
11	Sun., Nov. 21	PITTSBURGH	NBC	5:20 p.m.
12	Sun., Nov. 28	at Denver	CBS	1:05 p.m.
13	Sun., Dec. 5	at Cincinnati	FOX	10:00 a.m.
14	Sun., Dec. 12	N.Y. GIANTS	FOX	1:05 p.m.
15	Thurs., Dec. 16	KANSAS CITY	FOX	5:20 p.m.
16	Sun., Dec. 26	at Houston	CBS	10:00 a.m.
17	Sun., Jan. 2	DENVER	CBS	1:05 p.m.
18	Sun., Jan. 9	at Las Vegas	CBS	1:25 p.m.

**All Times Pacific*

HOME GAMES IN CAPS

2020 AFC WEST STANDINGS

Team	W	L	T	Pct.	PF	PA
Kansas City	14	2	0	.875	473	362
Las Vegas	8	8	0	.500	434	478
L.A. Chargers	**7**	**9**	**0**	**.438**	**384**	**426**
Denver	5	11	0	.313	323	446

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THE MATCHUP

AT THE HELM



BRANDON STALEY

Chargers Head Coach

Overall Record:	0-0 (.000)
Reg. Season Record:	0-0 (.000)
Preseason Record:	0-0 (.000)
Preseason Record vs. LAR:	0-0 (.000)
Road Record (Pre.):	0-0 (.000)
Hometown:	Perry, Ohio
College:	Dayton — '04 / Mercyhurst — '05

Brandon Staley became the 17th head coach in franchise history on Jan. 17, 2021, becoming the first Bolts head coach with a defensive background in over a decade. Staley served as the defensive coordinator in 2020 for the Los Angeles Rams after spending three seasons as the outside linebackers coach for Denver (2019) and Chicago (2017-18). Staley has coached four Pro Bowlers, some of the most dominant defensive NFL players in recent memory — Khalil Mack in 2018, Von Miller in 2019 and Aaron Donald and Jalen Ramsey in 2020. Three of those players (Mack, Donald and Ramsey) were also recognized by *The Associated Press* as first-team All-Pro selections.

As one of the most progressive defensive minds in football, Staley overhauled a Rams defense to become the best defense in football in 2020. The unit ranked No. 1 in total defense, passing defense and scoring defense while finishing as the third-best rushing defense. The Rams defensive unit improved by more than four points per game in scoring defense from 2019 to post the best single-season average allowed by the team in nearly two decades. Prior to coaching in the NFL, Staley spent three seasons (2013, '15-16) at John Carroll as defensive coordinator/secondary coach and the 2014 season as defensive coordinator/linebackers at James Madison. In his final season as a collegiate coach, Staley earned National Coordinator of the Year honors for Division III by leading his unit to rank third in the nation in total defense (218.0 ypg) and fourth in scoring defense (12.6 ppg).

Staley played quarterback at the University of Dayton, serving as a team captain and was a two-year starter. The Flyers posted a 16-5 record when Staley was the starter from 2003-04. He ended his playing career at Mercyhurst College, playing there in 2005 with his twin brother, Jason. A native of Perry, Ohio, Staley and his wife, Amy, have three sons — Colin, Will and Grant.



SEAN McVAY

Rams Head Coach

Overall Record:	46-24 (.657)
Reg. Season Record:	43-21 (.672)
Preseason Record:	6-6 (.500)
Preseason Record vs. LAC:	0-1 (.000)
Home Record (Pre.):	3-3 (.500)
Hometown:	Marietta, Ga.
College:	Miami (Ohio) — '07

On January 12, 2017, Los Angeles Rams Owner/Chairman E. Stanley Kroenke named Sean McVay the 23rd full-time head coach in franchise history. McVay became the youngest coach in modern NFL history at 30 years old.

Last season, McVay produced his fourth-straight winning season with the Rams, the longest consecutive winning season streak since the Rams posted four-consecutive winning seasons from 1983-1986. The 10-6 record earned L.A. its third postseason appearance in McVay's first four seasons leading the franchise.In McVay's second season, the Rams posted a 13-3 record, which tied for the second-best record in franchise history, won a pair of playoff games and advanced to the Rams fourth Super Bowl appearance days after his 33rd birthday, becoming the youngest NFL head coach to ever help his team to a Super Bowl. Before joining the Rams, McVay completed his third season as Washington's offensive coordinator in 2016 after initially being promoted to the position on January 15, 2014. Prior to his promotion during the 2014 offseason, McVay spent three seasons as the team's tight ends coach (2011-13) and one as an offensive assistant (2010).

McVay graduated from Miami University (Ohio) where he played wide receiver from 2004-07, earning Miami's Scholar-Athlete Award in 2007.

2020 TEAM RANKINGS

7-9 3rd (AFC West)	10-6 2nd (NFC West)

OFFENSE (NFL RANK)

24.0 (T-18th)	Points Per Game	23.3 (T-22nd)
382.1 (9th)	Net Yds. Per Game	377.0 (11th)
111.5 (18th)	Net Rushing Yds. Per Game	126.1 (10th)
270.6 (6th)	Net Passing Yds. Per Game	250.9 (13th)
5.42 (20th)	Scrimmage Yds. Per Play	5.54 (18th)
10/164	Opp. Interceptions/Return Yds.	14/125
34/-219 (T-15th)	Sacks Allowed/Yds.	25/-169 (T-6th)
16/6	Fumbles/Lost	19/11
44.20% (9th)	Third Down Pct.	43.4% (12th)
57.14% (21st)	Red Zone TD Pct.	57.1% (21st)
31:14 (8th)	Time of Possession Avg.	32:01 (2nd)
16 (T-4th)	Giveaways	25 (T-25th)

DEFENSE (NFL RANK)

26.6 (23rd)	Points Per Game	18.5 (1st)
343.4 (10th)	Net Yds. Per Game	281.9 (1st)
119.8 (18th)	Net Rushing Yds. Per Game	91.3 (3rd)
223.6 (9th)	Net Passing Yds. Per Game	190.7 (1st)
5.51 (16th)	Scrimmage Yds. Per Play	4.56 (1st)
12/217	Interceptions/ Return Yds.	14/266
27/-137 (25th)	Sacks/Yds.	53/-350 (2nd)
15/7	Opp. Fumbles/Lost	16/8
43.63% (22nd)	Third Down Pct.	35.2% (3rd)
58.18% (10th)	Red Zone TD Pct.	58.2% (10th)
19 (T-22nd)	Takeaways	22 (T-10th)

+3 (T-13th) ..... TURNOVER MARGIN ..... -3 (T-21st)

SPECIAL TEAMS (NFL RANK)

44.5 (25th)	Punts-Avg. Yds. (Gross)	44.9 (20th)
34.1 (32nd)	Punts-Avg. Yds. (Net)	39.2 (26th)
5.6 (28th)	Punt Returns-Avg. Per.	6.9 (23rd)
15.2 (31st)	Punt Returns-Avg. Per Allowed	12.9 (30th)
22.0 (15th)	Kickoff Returns-Avg. Per	20.6 (22nd)
26.9 (29th)	Kickoff Returns-Avg. Per Allowed	28.3 (30th)
24/33 (29th)	Field Goals Made/Attempted	24/30 (T-20th)

PENALTIES (NFL RANK)

85/710 (T-14th)	Penalties Against/Yds.	71/655 (2nd)

THE MATCHUP

MILESTONES WITHIN REACH THIS SEASON

WR Keenan Allen

- Needs 95 receptions to join WR Antonio Brown (6, 2013-18) as the only two receivers in NFL history to post 95-plus catches in five-straight seasons.
- Needs at least 76 catches within his first 10 games played of the season (110) to set the all-time record for the fewest games to reach 700 career receptions (Antonio Brown, 111).

OLB Joey Bosa

- Needs 2.5 sacks in to reach 50 for his career.
    - If done within the first six games of the season, would reach 50 sacks faster than any player in Chargers history (Leslie O'Neal, 70 games).
- Needs 12.5 sacks this season (final regular-season game is Jan. 9, 2022) to become the youngest player in history to reach 60 sacks — at 26 years, 181 days.

RB Austin Ekeler

- Needs two touchdown catches to reach 18 for his career, passing Danny Woodhead for the most by an udrafted running back in the common draft era (since 1967).
- Needs four touchdown catches by the end of the season to reach 20 for his career. He would be the youngest running back in the common draft era (since 1967) to reach 20 touchdown receptions (Chuck Foreman; 26 years, 333 days).
- Needs six touchdown catches to set the record for most receiving touchdowns through any running back's first five seasons in NFL history (Chuck Foreman, 21).
- Needs 883 receiving yards to set the record for most receiving yards by an undrafted running back in the common draft era (since 1967), passing Priest Holmes (2,962).

QB Justin Herbert

- Needs 329 completions to set the record for the most in a quarterback's first two seasons in NFL history (Kyler Murray; 724, 2019-20).
- Needs 3,861 passing yards to set the NFL record for most passing yards in a quarterback's first two seasons in NFL history (Andrew Luck; 8,196, 2012-13).
- Needs 4,000-plus passing yards to become just the second quarterback in history to have two 4,000-yard campaigns in each of their first two seasons (Jameis Winston, 2015-16).
- With 30 passing touchdowns, would be come the first player in NFL history to do so in each of his first two seasons.
- Needs 38 passing touchdowns to set the NFL record for most passing scores in a quarterback's first two seasons in NFL history (Dan Marino; 68, 1983-84).
- Needs three 300-yard passing performances to set the record for most games with 300-plus yards passing in a quarterback's first two seasons in NFL history (Dan Marino, Patrick Mahomes; 10).
- Needs 10 games with multiple touchdown passes to join Dan Marino (22) as the only two players with 20 such games in their first two seasons.

2020 INDIVIDUAL LEADERS



7-9
3rd (AFC West)



10-6
2nd (NFC West)

PASSING YARDS

Herbert	4,336	Goff*	3,952
Taylor*	208	Wolford	231

RUSHING YARDS

Ekeler	530	Akers	625
Kelley	354	Henderson Jr.	624

RECEIVING YARDS

Allen	992	Kupp	974
Williams	756	Woods	936
Henry*	613	Reynolds*	618
Guyton	511	Higbee	521

POINTS SCORED

Badgley	108	Gay	58
Allen	50	Woods	48
Herbert	30	Sloman*	42
Williams	30	Henderson Jr.	36

INTERCEPTIONS

Davis	3	D.Williams	4
Jenkins*	2	Hill*	3
Seven Tied	1	Fuller	3

SACKS

Bosa	7.5	Donald	13.5
Nwosu	4.5	Floyd	10.5
Tillery	3.0	Fox*	6.0

TACKLES (SOLO)

Murray Jr.	107 (68)	Johnson III*	105 (73)
Jenkins*	81 (56)	Hill*	77 (55)
White	77 (50)	Kiser	77 (44)
Adderley	69 (58)	Reeder	73 (46)

KICKOFF RETURNS (AVG.)

Adderley	11 (28.9)	Webster*	16 (21.7)
Reed	21 (20.7)		

PUNT RETURNS (AVG.); FC

Hill Jr.	12 (6.9); 11	Webster*	25 (7.4); 17

FIELD GOALS

Badgley	13/16 (81.3%)	Gay	14/16 (87.5%)
		Sloman	8/11 (72.7%)
		Forbath	2/3 (66.7%)

PUNTS (GROSS/NET AVG.)

Long	57 (46.8/34.1)	Hekker	68 (45.6/39.2)

**Player no longer with team*

CHARGERS-RAMS CONNECTIONS

COLLEGE CONNECTIONS

	LAC	S Derwin James	2015-17
	LAC	FB Gabe Nabers	2016-19
	LAC	TE Tre' McKitty	2017-19
	LAC	CB Asante Samuel Jr.	2018-20
	LAR	CB Jalen Ramsey	2013-15
	LAR	RB Cam Akers	2017-19
	LAC	RB Justin Jackson	2014-17
	LAC	OLB Joe Gaziano	2015-19
	LAC	T Rashawn Slater	2017-20
	LAC	Cody Cejda (Spec. Asst. to Head Coach)	2009-20
	LAR	WR Ben Skowronek	2016-19
	LAR	DL Earnest Brown IV	2017-20
	LAC	S Nasir Adderley	2015-18
	LAR	ILB Troy Reader	2016-18
	LAC	LB Kenneth Murray Jr.	2017-19
	LAR	OLB Ogbonnia Okoronkwo	2014-17
	LAR	OL Bobby Evans	2015-18
	LAC	LS Cole Mazza	2013-16
	LAC	Derrick Ansley (Secondary)	2010-11, '16-17
	LAC	Isaac Shewmaker (Def. Quality Control)	2016-19
	LAR	DL A'Shawn Robinson	2013-15
	LAR	OLB Terrell Lewis	2016-20
	LAC	QB Justin Herbert	2016-19
	LAC	TE Hunter Kampmoyer	2016-20
	LAR	LB Justin Hollins	2014-18
	LAC	OLB Joey Bosa	2013-15
	LAC	WR KJ Hill Jr.	2015-19
	LAR	S Jordan Fuller	2016-19
	LAC	K Tristan Vizcaino	2014-17
	LAC	John Timu (Alex G. Spanos Fellowship)	2011-14, '19-20
	LAR	OL Coleman Shelton	2013-17
	LAR	DL Greg Gaines	2014-18
	LAR	S Taylor Rapp	2016-18
	LAC	LB Nick Niemann	2017-20
	LAC	Derrick Foster (Running Backs)	2018-20
	LAR	S Jake Gervase	2014-18
	LAR	OL AJ Jackson	2016-20
	LAC	WR Joe Reed	2016-19
	LAC	Chris Beatty (Wide Receivers)	2015
	LAR	ILB Micah Kiser	2013-17
	LAR	QB Bryce Perkins	2018-19
	LAC	RB Larry Rountree III	2017-20
	LAR	TE Kendall Blanton	2014-18
	LAC	P Ty Long	2011-14
	LAR	CB Darious Williams	2014-17
	LAC	G Nate Gilliam	2015-19
	LAC	DL Willie Yarbary	2015-18
	LAR	QB John Wolford	2014-17
	LAC	Chris Beatty (Wide Receivers)	2013-14
	LAR	OL Rob Havenstein	2010-14
	LAR	Thomas Brown (RBs/Asst. Head Coach)	2014

NOTEWORTHY BONDS

Chargers **Head Coach Brandon Staley** served as Rams Defensive Coordinator last season, leading the NFL's top-ranked total defense, passing defense and scoring defense. Under **Staley** in 2020, Rams **CB Jalen Ramsey** and **DT Aaron Donald** each received *AP* First-Team All-Pro recognition.

Rams **Head Coach Sean McVay** played for Chargers **Run Game Coordinator/OL Coach Frank Smith** at Miami (Ohio) University from 2004-05. **McVay**, a former RedHawks receiver, spent his first two collegiate seasons under the tutelage of **Smith**, who served as an offensive graduate assistant at his alma mater, Miami (Ohio).

Chargers **TE Jared Cook** played three seasons for the Rams (2013-15), leading St. Louis in receiving in 2013.

Rams **LBs Coach Chris Shula** held the role of defensive quality control coach for the Chargers from 2015-16, while Rams **DL Coach Eric Henderson** served as Asst. DL Coach for the Bolts from 2017-18. During his time with the Chargers, Henderson worked under Chargers **DL Coach Giff Smith**, who was Henderson's position coach as a collegiate player for Georgia Tech.

Chargers **Special Teams Coordinator Derius Swinton II** was teammates with Rams **Asst. DL Coach Marcus Dixon** for three seasons (2004-06) at Hampton Univeristy in Hampton, Va., as the pair helped lead the Pirates to three-straight Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference championships from 2004-06. **Swinton II** and **Dixon** helped grant Hampton their third-straight conference crown in 2006, the same season in which Chargers **WRs Coach Chris Beatty** served as Offensive Coordinator/QBs Coach for the Pirates.

Bolts **WR Austin Proehl** spent the final segment of the 2018 season with the NFC-Champion Rams en route to the club's Super Bowl LIII appearance. **Proehl**'s father, **Ricky Proehl**, appeared in two Super Bowls during his playing career with the Rams, contributing to the club's defeat of the Titans in Super Bowl XXXIV.

Both Rams **Offensive Coordinator Kevin O'Connell** ('03) and Chargers **C/G Scott Quessenberry** ('12) attended La Costa Canyon H.S. in Carlsbad, Calif. As a player, **O'Connell** spent a segment of training camp prior to the 2012 season with the Chargers.

Rams **Asst. Secondary Coach Jonathan Cooley** spent 2013-14 coaching the secondary at John Carroll University, working under then-defensive coordinators **Brandon Staley** in 2013 and **Chris Shula**, current Rams LBs Coach, in 2014. One season later in 2015, **Cooley** worked as a defensive graduate assistant at the University of Kentucky, learning under then-co-defensive coordinator of the Wildcats, current Chargers **Secondary Coach Derrick Ansley**.

Chargers **WR Jalen Guyton** and Rams **OL Bobby Evans** were teammates at Allen High School in Allen, Texas, from 2012-14, winning Texas Division I (Class 5A, 6A) State Championships each of their three seasons together.

PRO CONNECTIONS

Head Coach Brandon Staley (2017-18) QB Chase Daniel (2018-19) Run Game Coord./OLBs Jay Rodgers (2015-20) Run Game Coord./OL Frank Smith (2015-17) Spec. Teams Coord. Derius Swinton II (2015, '17) *Alex G. Spanos Fellow John Timu (2015-17)*	OLB Leonard Floyd (2016-19)
QB Chase Daniel (2020) G Oday Aboushi (2019-20) Offensive Coord. Joe Lombardi (2014-15) Spec. Teams Coord. Derius Swinton II (2018)	QB Matthew Stafford (2009-20) DL A'Shawn Robinson (2016-19) Sr. Coaching Asst. John Bonamego (2013-14, '19)
CB Ryan Smith (2016-20)	WR DeSean Jackson (2017-18) K Matt Gay (2019)
QBs Coach Shane Day (2014-15)	Head Coach Sean McVay (2010-16) WR DeSean Jackson (2014-16) Defensive Coord. Raheem Morris (2012-14) TEs Coach/Pass Game Coord. Wes Phillips (2014-18)
C Corey Linsley (2014-20) OLB Kyler Fackrell (2016-19) T Bryan Bulaga (2010-19) TE Jared Cook (2016) TEs Coach Kevin Koger (2019-20)	Secondary/Pass Game Coord. Ejiro Eviro (2016)
Asst. Spec. Teams Mayur Chaudhari (2018-20)	Defensive Coord. Raheem Morris (2015-20) Off. Asst. Nick Jones (2020)
Spec. Teams Coord. Derius Swinton II (2016)	Offensive Coordinator Kevin O'Connell (2016)

Underlined indicates coaching or administrative roles.

Italicized indicates coaches who were players at the time.

TOM TELESCO



IN-SEASON RECOGNITION

Telesco has acquired 10 players since 2013 to win AFC Player of the Week recognition and one to win AFC Player of the Month. **Joey Bosa** twice earned NFL Defensive Rookie of the Month in 2016 (October and December) en route to winning conensus Defensive Rookie of the Year honors.

In 2020, **Justin Herbert** was named the NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month for October and November, tossing 10-plus touchdowns in both months. He posting a 122.2 passer rating in October — the best by a rookie in the month in NFL history (min. 50 attemps). He was widely recognized after his record-setting season as Offensive Rookie of the Year.

CHARGERS TO WIN AFC PLAYER OF THE WEEK/MONTH OR NFL ROOKIE OF THE MONTH, ACQUIRED SINCE 2013

Year	Player	Phase	Month/Week
2016	P Drew Kaser	Special Teams	Week 6 vs. Den.
	LB Denzel Perryman	Defense	Week 7 at Atl.
	DE Joey Bosa	NFL Def. Rookie	October
	RB Melvin Gordon III	Offense	Week 9 vs. Ten.
	DE Joey Bosa	NFL Def. Rookie	December
2017	RB Melvin Gordon III	Offense	Week 5 at NYG
	WR Travis Benjamin	Special Teams	Week 7 vs. Den.
	CB Casey Hayward Jr.	Defense	November
2018	CB Desmond King II	Defense	Week 9 at Sea.
	CB Desmond King II	Special Teams	Week 13 at Pit.
	K Michael Badgley	Special Teams	Week 14 vs. Cin.
	WR Mike Williams	Offense	Week 15 at K.C.
2019	P Ty Long	Special Teams	Week 1 vs. Ind.
	DE Joey Bosa	Defense	Week 8 at Chi.
2020	CB Casey Hayward Jr.	Defense	Week 1 at Cin.
	QB Justin Herbert	NFL Off. Rookie	October
	QB Justin Herbert	NFL Off. Rookie	November

TELESCO'S PRO BOWLERS

Throughout his tenure with the Chargers, **Telesco** has acquired or extended 11 players that went on to earn Pro Bowl nods, including five players that were acquired via draft pick.

BOLTS PRO BOWLERS ACQUIRED OR EXTENDED, SINCE 2013

Year	Player	Transaction	Pro Bowls
2013	WR Keenan Allen	Drafted (3-76)	4
2014	S Adrian Phillips	UDFA	1
	CB Jason Verrett	Drafted (1-25)	1
2015	RB Melvin Gordon III	Drafted (1-15)	2
	QB Philip Rivers	Extended	3
2016	DE Joey Bosa	Drafted (1-3)	3
	CB Casey Hayward Jr.	UFA (G.B.)	2
2017	DE Melvin Ingram III	Extension	3
	T Russell Okung	UFA (Den.)	1
2018	S Derwin James Jr.	Drafted (1-17)	1
	C Mike Pouncey	FA	1
Totals	**11 Players**		**22**
	5 Drafted Players		***11***

TELESCO'S PFWA SUPERLATIVES

Selections made by **Telesco** have garnered league-wide recognition. He has drafted 10 players that were named All-Rookie by the *Professional Football Writers of America*.

Three picks by Telesco earned *PFWA* Rookie of the Year honors — **Keenan Allen** for offense in 2013, **Joey Bosa** for defense in 2016 and **Justin Herbert** overall and for offense in 2020.

Derwin James Jr. was named All-NFL by the *PFWA* as a rookie while Bosa also has been named to the organization's All-AFC team in three of his five pro seasons, tying for the most over that span.

Below is a look at Telesco's draft picks that have been recognized by the *PFWA* as All-NFL, All-AFC or All-Rookie:

CHARGERS DRAFT PICK SUPERLATIVES FROM PFWA WHILE WITH TEAM, SINCE 2013

Drafted	Player	All-NFL	All-AFC	All-Rookie
2013	Keenan Allen	0	1	1
	D.J. Fluker	0	0	1
2016	Joey Bosa	0	3	1
	Jatavis Brown	0	0	1
	Hunter Henry	0	0	1
2017	Dan Feeney	0	0	1
2018	Derwin James Jr.	1	1	1
2019	Drue Tranquill	0	0	1
2020	Justin Herbert	0	0	1
	Kenneth Murray Jr.	0	0	1
Totals	**10 Players**	**1**	**5**	**10**

TOM TELESCO DRAFT HISTORY



Chargers General Manager **Tom Telesco** has drafted 61 players since joining the team in 2013. Those draft picks have combined to play 1,739 games and make 938 starts in the regular season (43 games played with 26 starts in the postseason) for the Bolts.

2021 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
T	Rashawn Slater	1-13	0	0	0	0
CB	Asante Samuel Jr.	2-47	0	0	0	0
WR	Josh Palmer	3-77	0	0	0	0
TE	Tre' McKitty	3-97	0	0	0	0
OLB	Chris Rumph II	4-118	0	0	0	0
G/T	Brenden Jaimes	5-159	0	0	0	0
LB	Nick Niemann	6-185	0	0	0	0
RB	Larry Rountree III	6-198	0	0	0	0
DB	Mark Webb Jr.	7-241	0	0	0	0
TOTALS			**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**

2020 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
QB	Justin Herbert	1-6	15	15	0	0
LB	Kenneth Murray Jr.	1-23	16	16	0	0
RB	Joshua Kelley	4-112	14	0	0	0
WR	Joe Reed	5-151	11	0	0	0
S	Alohi Gilman	6-186	15	0	0	0
WR	KJ Hill Jr.	7-220	15	0	0	0
TOTALS			**86**	**31**	**0**	**0**

2019 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
DL	Jerry Tillery	1-28	31	14	0	0
S	Nasir Adderley	2-60	19	14	0	0
T	Trey Pipkins III	3-91	26	8	0	0
LB	Drue Tranquill	4-130	16	4	0	0
QB	Easton Stick	5-166	1	0	0	0
OLB	Emeke Egbule	6-200	29	0	0	0
DL	Cortez Broughton	7-242	11	0	0	0
TOTALS			**133**	**40**	**0**	**0**

2018 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
S	Derwin James Jr.	1-17	21	21	2	2
OLB	Uchenna Nwosu	2-48	45	10	2	0
DL	Justin Jones	3-84	40	24	2	2
LB	Kyzir White	4-119	30	20	0	0
C/G	Scott Quessenberry	5-155	47	9	2	0
WR	Dylan Cantrell	6-191	0	0	0	0
RB	Justin Jackson	7-251	29	5	2	0
TOTALS			**212**	**89**	**10**	**4**

2017 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
WR	Mike Williams	1-7	56	32	2	2
G	Forrest Lamp	2-38	25	18	0	0
C/G	Dan Feeney	3-71	63	57	2	2
S	Rayshawn Jenkins	4-113	61	32	2	2
DB	Desmond King II	5-151	53	23	2	2
T	Sam Tevi	6-190	58	44	2	2
DE	Isaac Rochell	7-225	51	9	2	0
TOTALS			**366**	**215**	**12**	**10**

2016 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
OLB	Joey Bosa	1-3	63	59	2	2
TE	Hunter Henry	2-35	55	49	1	1
C	Max Tuerk	3-66	0	0	0	0
LB	Joshua Perry	4-102	15	1	0	0
LB	Jatavis Brown	5-175	56	23	0	0
P	Drew Kaser	6-179	36	0	0	0
FB	Derek Watt	6-198	64	13	2	0
G	Donavon Clark	7-224	0	0	0	0
TOTALS			**289**	**145**	**5**	**3**

2015 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
RB	Melvin Gordon III	1-15	67	63	2	2
LB	Denzel Perryman	2-48	69	51	0	0
CB	Craig Mager	3-83	24	10	0	0
LB	Kyle Emanuel	5-153	63	32	2	0
DE	Darius Philon	6-192	54	19	2	0
TOTALS			**277**	**175**	**6**	**2**

2014 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
CB	Jason Verrett	1-25	25	21	0	0
LB	Jeremiah Attaochu	2-50	38	13	0	0
G	Chris Watt	3-89	17	8	0	0
DT	Ryan Carrethers	5-165	24	3	0	0
RB	Marion Grice	6-201	0	0	0	0
WR	Tevin Reese	7-240	0	0	0	0
TOTALS			**104**	**45**	**0**	**0**

2013 CHARGERS DRAFT SELECTIONS

			Reg. Season		Postseason	
Pos.	**Player**	**Drafted**	**GP**	**GS**	**GP**	**GS**
T	D.J. Fluker	1-11	59	59	2	2
LB	Manti Te'o	2-38	38	34	2	2
WR	Keenan Allen	3-76	100	95	4	3
CB	Steve Williams	5-145	31	4	0	0
LB	Tourek Williams	6-179	44	6	2	0
QB	Brad Sorensen	7-221	0	0	0	0
TOTALS			**272**	**198**	**10**	**7**

Current Chargers are bolded in Powder Blue

BRANDON STALEY TAKES THE HELM

The Los Angeles Chargers hired Brandon Staley as the 17th head coach in franchise history, becoming the first Bolts head coach with a defensive background in over a decade. Staley served as the defensive coordinator in 2020 for the Los Angeles Rams after spending three seasons as the outside linebackers coach for Denver (2019) and Chicago (2017-18).

Staley has coached four Pro Bowlers, some of the most dominant defensive NFL players in recent memory — Khalil Mack in 2018, Von Miller in 2019 and Aaron Donald and Jalen Ramsey in 2020. Three of those players (Mack, Donald and Ramsey) were also recognized by The Associated Press as first-team All-Pro selections. He looks to continue the trend with star Bolts defenders Joey Bosa and Derwin James Jr.



As one of the most progressive defensive minds in football, Staley overhauled a Rams defense to become the best defense in football in 2020. The unit ranked No. 1 in total defense, passing defense and scoring defense while finishing as the third-best rushing defense. The Rams defensive unit improved by more than four points per game in scoring defense from 2019 to post the best single-season average allowed by the team in nearly two decades.



Staley brought innovation on defense from college to the NFL, serving as outside linebackers coach in Chicago (2017-18) and Denver (2019). He served on Vic Fangio's staff in Denver after following the former defensive coordinator from Chicago. The 2019 Broncos defense led the NFL in red zone scoring, allowing a touchdown on just 39.1 percent of red zone drives — the second-lowest allowed by any NFL defense in the last five seasons. In his two years with Chicago, the Bears led the NFL in takeaways (58) while tying for No. 2 with 92 sacks. Staley was part of a staff in 2018 that coached the top-ranked scoring defense in football (17.7 points per game).

STALEY'S CAREER CAPSULE

PLAYING BACKGROUND

Season	College/Pro Team	Position
2001-04	University of Dayton	Quarterback
2005	Mercyhurst College	Quarterback

COACHING BACKGROUND

Season	College/Pro Team	Position
2006-08	Northern Illinois University	Graduate Assistant
2009	Univ. of St. Thomas	Def. Line/Special Teams
2010-11	Hutchinson (Kan.) CC	Asso. HC/Def. Coordinator
2012	University of Tennessee	Graduate Assistant
2013	John Carroll Univ.	Def. Coordinator/Secondary
2014	James Madison Univ.	Def. Coordinator/LBs
2015-16	John Carroll Univ.	Def. Coordinator/Secondary
2017-18	Chicago Bears	Outside Linebackers
2019	Denver Broncos	Outside Linebackers
2020	Los Angeles Rams	Defensive Coordinator
2021-Present	Los Angeles Chargers	Head Coach

Prior to coaching in the NFL, Staley spent three seasons (2013, '15-16) at John Carroll as defensive coordinator/secondary coach and the 2014 season as defensive coordinator/linebackers at James Madison. In his final season as a collegiate coach, Staley earned National Coordinator of the Year honors for Division III by leading the John Carroll unit to rank third in the nation in total defense (218.0 yards per game) and fourth in scoring defense (12.6 points per game).

Before his stints at John Carroll and James Madison, Staley was a graduate assistant in 2012 at Tennessee. Staley held his first coordinator job as associate head coach/defensive coordinator at Hutchinson (Kan.) Community College from 2010-11. Over those two seasons, he helped develop Cordarrelle Patterson, Markus Golden and De'Vondre Campbell into NFL Draft picks.

Staley began his coaching career as a graduate assistant at Northern Illinois (2006-08) before coaching the defensive line and special teams in 2009 at the University of St. Thomas. He played quarterback at the University of Dayton, serving as a team captain and was a two-year starter. The Flyers posted a 16-5 record when Staley was the starter from 2003-04. He ended his playing career at Mercyhurst College, playing there in 2005 with his twin brother, Jason. A native of Perry, Ohio, Staley and his wife, Amy, have three sons — Colin, Will and Grant.



TEAM NOTES

WELCOME TO L.A.



35 players on Los Angeles' active roster are new this season.

HOW NEW CHARGERS WERE ACQUIRED

How Acquired	New Players
Draft Selections	9
Undrafted Free Agents	10
Veteran Free Agents	14
Trades	0
Waiver Claims	2
Totals	**35**

NEW CHARGERS ON THE ACTIVE ROSTER

Pos.	Player	Exp.	How Acq.
G	Oday Aboushi	9	UFA (Detroit)
WR	Michael Bandy	1	Free Agent
TE	Jared Cook	13	UFA (New Orleans)
QB	KJ Costello	R	Undrafted Free Agent
DL	Christian Covington	7	Free Agent
QB	Chase Daniel	12	Free Agent
DB	Ben DeLuca	R	Undrafted Free Agent
OLB	Kyler Fackrell	6	UFA (N.Y. Giants)
G	Matt Feiler	5	UFA (Pittsburgh)
CB	Kemon Hall	1	Waivers (Dallas)
T	Darius Harper	R	Undrafted Free Agent
G/T	Brenden Jaimes	R	Draft Selection (5-159)
TE	Hunter Kampmoyer	R	Undrafted Free Agent
K	Alex Kessman	R	Undrafted Free Agent
LS	Ryan Langan	R	Undrafted Free Agent
C	Corey Linsley	8	UFA (Green Bay)
LB	Damon Lloyd	1	Free Agent
TE	Tre' McKitty	R	Draft Selection (3-97)
DL	Forrest Merrill	R	Undrafted Free Agent
LB	Nick Niemann	R	Draft Selection (6-185)
LB	Amen Ogbongbemiga	R	Undrafted Free Agent
DL	Chris Okoye	1	Free Agent
WR	Joshua Palmer	R	Draft Selection (3-77)
WR	Austin Proehl	1	Waivers (San Francisco)
RB	Larry Rountree III	R	Draft Selection (6-198)
OLB	Chris Rumph II	R	Draft Selection (4-118)
CB	KJ Sails	R	Undrafted Free Agent
CB	Asante Samuel Jr.	R	Draft Selection (2-47)
TE	Matt Seybert	1	Free Agent
T	Rashawn Slater	R	Draft Selection (1-13)
CB	Ryan Smith	6	UFA (Tampa Bay)
T	Kyle Spalding	R	Undrafted Free Agent
K	Tristan Vizcaino	1	Free Agent
DB	Mark Webb Jr.	R	Draft Selection (7-241)
DL	Willie Yarbary	1	Free Agent

NEW UNIFORM RECORD

In April 2020, the Bolts unveiled new, sleek uniforms to make the best uniform in sports even better — marking a new era of Chargers football as the team moved into SoFi Stadium. Below is the team's record for the uniform colors as well as combinations.

CHARGERS RECORD BY UNIFORM AND COMBOS

Uniform/Combo	Wins	Losses	Ties	Pct.
Powder Blue Uniform	3	3	0	.500
White Pants Combo	*3*	*1*	*0*	*.750*
Gold Pants Combo	*0*	*2*	*0*	*.000*
White Uniform	3	4	0	.429
White Pants Combo	*1*	*2*	*0*	*.333*
Gold Pants Combo	*2*	*2*	*0*	*.500*
Navy Blue Color Rush	0	2	0	.000
Royal Blue Color Rush	1	0	0	1.000

DIAMONDS IN THE ROUGH

In each season from 2008-20, at least one undrafted rookie has made the Chargers active roster for the Week 1 game. Seven of those players appeared in 16 regular-season contests for the team, 11 made a start and eight started multiple times as a rookie.

UNDRAFTED ROOKIES ON KICKOFF WEEKEND ROSTER, SINCE 2008

Season	Player	College	GP as Rookie*
2020	FB Gabe Nabers**	Florida State	16 (5 starts)
2019	DE Chris Peace	Virginia	1
	S Roderic Teamer	Tulane	7 (6 starts)
2018	LB Emmanuel Ellerbee***	Rice	3
	CB Brandon Facyson	Virginia Tech	15
	WR JJ Jones	West Georgia	3
	RB Detrez Newsome	Western Carolina	9
2017	TE Sean Culkin	Missouri	1
	RB Austin Ekeler	Western State Colorado	16
	LB Nigel Harris	South Florida	5 (1 start)
	K Younghoe Koo	Georgia Southern	4
	LB James Onwualu	Notre Dame	9
2016	RB Kenneth Farrow	Houston	13 (2 starts)
	S Dexter McCoil	Tulsa	16 (2 starts)
	C/G Spencer Pulley	Vanderbilt	16
2015	LB Nick Dzubnar	Cal Poly-San Luis Obispo	16
	WR Tyrell Williams	Western Oregon	7
2014	CB Chris Davis	Auburn	12 (1 start)
	RB Branden Oliver	Buffalo	14 (7 starts)
	DT Tenny Palepoi	Utah	16
2013	S Jahleel Addae	Central Michigan	16 (2 starts)
	DT Kwame Geathers	Georgia	7
2012	G Mike Harris	UCLA	15 (9 starts)
2011	LB Darryl Gamble	Georgia	5
2010	LB Brandon Lang	Troy	10
2009	S C.J. Spillman	Marshall	5 (1 start)
2008	RB Mike Tolbert	Coastal Carolina	13 (7 starts)

**Number of games played as rookie for Chargers*
***Part of 55-man active roster for Week 1 (2020 COVID elevation)*
****Claimed off waivers from Seattle following final cuts*

JUSTIN HERBERT

A ROOKIE CAMPAIGN FOR THE AGES

AWARDS

- *The Associated Press* Offensive Rookie of the Year
- *Professional Football Writers of America* Rookie of the Year
- *PFWA* Offensive Rookie of the Year
- *PFWA* All-Rookie Selection
- NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month (October)
- NFL Offensive Rookie of the Month (November)
- FedEx NFL Air Player of the Week — Week 11 vs. NYJ (fan vote)
- Voted by fans as the Pepsi Zero Sugar Rookie of the Year
- Nine-time Pepsi Zero Sugar Rookie of the Week (voted by fans)

RECORDS

- Most passing touchdowns by a rookie quarterback ever (31).
- Most total touchdowns by a rookie in NFL history (36).
- Most consecutive games by a rookie quarterback with multiple passing touchdowns in NFL history (seven).
- Most performances by a rookie quarterback with 300-plus passing yards in NFL history (eight).
- Most performances by a rookie quarterback with three-plus touchdowns in NFL history (six).
- Most games by a rookie quarterback with multiple touchdown passes in NFL history (10).
- Most completions ever by a rookie quarterback (396).
- Youngest player ever to throw 30 touchdowns in a single season, doing so at 22 years, 299 days old.
- Tied for the longest streak of game-winning drives (three games) in the fourth quarter or overtime by a rookie quarterback in the Super Bowl era (since 1966).
- Recorded the first win in pro football history by a rookie quarterback while posting 300 passing yards, three touchdown passes, a rushing score and no interceptions.
- Most passing touchdowns by a rookie quarterback in a game (four) and a half (three) in *Monday Night Football* history.
- Tied for the longest streak of games with three-plus touchdown passes by a rookie quarterback in NFL history (four).
- Tied for the most 300-yard passing performances in a player's first two career games (two).
- Became the first player since at least 1970 to register over 1,500 passing yards and a 100-plus passer rating through the first five games of a career.
- Set marks for the most passing attempts, completions, passing yards and touchdown passes by a rookie quarterback in Chargers history.
- Recorded the most single-game rushing yards by a quarterback in team annals (66 in Week 7 vs. Jax.).

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

- Ranked second among rookie quarterbacks in NFL history with 4,336 passing yards on the season.
- Joined Patrick Mahomes as the only players in history to eclipse 4,000 passing yards in the first 14 starts of a career.
- Became the second player in NFL history to top 250 passing yards in each of the first seven games of a career (Mahomes).
- Threw a touchdown pass in each of his first 10 games played, the second-longest streak to open an career in NFL history.
- Threw for 277 yards in the first half of Week 11, the most by any rookie quarterback in a first half over the last 40 seasons.
- Became the third quarterback in NFL history to have 300 passing yards and a rushing score in a debut.
- Threw for the fourth-most passing yards in a debut since 1970.
- Became the first quarterback to throw a touchdown and run for a score in the first half of a debut since 1954.

OFFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

Justin Herbert earned widespread recognition as the Offensive Rookie of the Year, including as the 10th quarterback in history to win the honor from *The Associated Press*. Herbert was also selected by *Professional Football Writers of America* as Rookie of the Year and Offensive Rookie of the Year — becoming the second and seventh quarterback to win those awards, respectively. He is the first player in history to be recognized with all three honors.

QBs TO WIN *AP* OFFENSIVE ROOKIE OF THE YEAR

Season	Team	Player	Total TDs
2020	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**36**
2019	Ari.	Kyler Murray	24
2016	Dal.	Dak Prescott	29
2012	Was.	Robert Griffin III	27
2011	Car.	Cam Newton	35
2010	StL	Sam Bradford	19
2008	Atl.	Matt Ryan	17
2006	Ten.	Vince Young	19
2004	Pit.	Ben Roethlisberger	18
1970	Buf.	Dennis Shaw	10



JUSTIN HERBERT

HOT OUT OF THE GATE

Justin Herbert kicked off his career with a pair of historic streaks. The rookie tossed a touchdown pass in each of the first 10 games of his career, just one leess than the all-time record. Herbert's streak of games with 250-plus passing yards to start a career ended at seven contests, ranking second in NFL history to Patrick Mahomes' 10-game streak.

PLAYERS WITH A PASSING TOUCHDOWN, CONSECUTIVE GAMES TO START CAREER, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team	Player	Consecutive Games
1.	Was.	QB Mark Rypien	11
2.	**LAC**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**10**
3.	Den.	QB Jay Cutler	9

PLAYERS WITH 250 PASSING YARDS, CONSECUTIVE GAMES TO START CAREER, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team	Player	Consecutive Games
1.	K.C.	QB Patrick Mahomes	10
2.	**LAC**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**7**
3.	—	Seven Other Players	2

COMING UP CLUTCH

Justin Herbert posted a game-winning drive in the fourth quarter or overtime of three-straight games last year, becoming just the third rookie to do so since the 1970 NFL-AFL merger. The two others — Ben Roethlisberger (2004) and Vince Young (2008) — also won Offensive Rookie of the Year honors from *The Associated Press*.

THREE CONSECUTIVE GAME-WINNING DRIVES, ROOKIE QBs, SINCE 1970

Season	Team	Player	Consecutive Games
2020	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**3 (Dec. 13 — Dec. 27)**
2006	Ten.	Vince Young*	3 (Nov. 26 — Dec. 10)
2004	Pit.	Ben Roethlisberger*	3 (Dec. 5 — Dec. 18)

**Won AP Offensive Rookie of the Year*

ROOKIE SENSATION

Justin Herbert tossed three touchdowns and 347 yards while adding a rushing score in 2020's Week 7 win over Jacksonville. The performance gave him the first win in history by a rookie quarterback while posting 300 passing yards, three touchdown passes, a rushing score and no interceptions.

ROOKIE QBs WITH 300 PASSING YDS, THREE PASSING TDs AND A RUSHING TD, SINGLE GAMES, PRO FOOTBALL HISTORY

Season (Wk)	Team	Player	INTs	Result
2020 (7)	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**0**	**W, 39-29**
2020 (7)	Cin.	Joe Burrow	1	L, 37-34
1969 (2)	Cin.	Greg Cook	1	W, 34-20

A BIG-TIME ROOKIE

In 2020, **Justin Herbert** posted the most passing touchdowns (31) and total touchdowns (36) by a rookie quarterback in NFL history.

He also registered a rookie-record five games with three-plus touchdowns. Four of those games were in a row, joining Deshaun Watson as the only rookie quarterbacks in NFL history with three or more consecutive games of three-plus touchdown passes.

Herbert had a seven-game streak with multiple touchdown passes, good for the longest by a rookie quarterback in NFL history and tied for the third-best in team history. He finished the year with a rookie-record 10 multi-touchdown games.

PASSING TOUCHDOWNS, ROOKIE QBs, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passing TDs
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**31**
2.	2018	Cle.	Baker Mayfield	27
3.	2012	Sea.	Russell Wilson	26
	1998	Ind.	Peyton Manning	26

TOTAL TOUCHDOWNS, ROOKIE QBs, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Total TDs
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**36**
2.	2011	Car.	Cam Newton	35
3.	2012	Sea.	Russell Wilson	30

GAMES WITH MULTIPLE PASSING TOUCHDOWNS, ROOKIE QUARTERBACKS, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Games
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**10**
2.	2018	Cle.	Baker Mayfield	9

With 4,336 passing yards, Herbert ended the season with the second-most passing yards in NFL history among rookie quarterbacks. Herbert completed 396 passes and tossed for 300-plus yards in eight games, the most by a rookie quarterback in history.

PASSING YARDS, ROOKIE QBs, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passing Yards
1.	2012	Ind.	Andrew Luck	4,374
2.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**4,336**
3.	2011	Car.	Cam Newton	4,051
4.	2015	T.B.	Jameis Winston	4,042

GAMES WITH 300-PLUS PASSING YARDS, ROOKIE QUARTERBACKS, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Games
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**8**
2.	2012	Ind.	Andrew Luck	6

COMPLETIONS, ROOKIE QBs, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Completions
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**396**
2.	2016	Phi.	Carson Wentz	379
3.	2010	StL	Sam Bradford	354

JUSTIN HERBERT

EFFICIENCY AT ITS FINEST

With a 98.3 passer rating in 2020, **Justin Herbert** had the No. 5 rating by a rookie quarterback in NFL history (min. 200 att.).

Herbert's 66.6 completion percentage was the second-best and his 288.1 passing yards per game ranked No. 1 in NFL history among rookie QBs with at least 200 passing attempts.

PASSER RATING, ROOKIE QBs, MIN. 200 ATT., NFL HISTORY

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passer Rating
1.	2016	Dal.	Dak Prescott*	104.9
2.	2017	Hou.	Deshaun Watson	103.0
3.	2012	Was.	Robert Griffin III*	102.4
4.	2012	Sea.	Russell Wilson	100.0
5.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**98.3**
6.	2004	Pit.	Ben Roethlisberger*	98.1
7.	1983	Mia.	Dan Marino	96.0

COMPLETION PCT., ROOKIE QBs, MIN. 200 ATT., NFL HISTORY

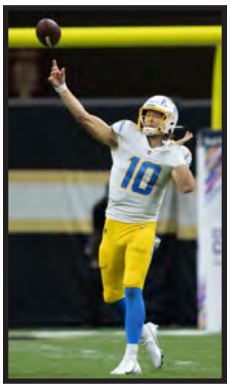
Rank	Year	Team	Player	Comp. Pct.
1.	2016	Dal.	Dak Prescott*	67.8
2.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**66.6**
3.	2004	Pit.	Ben Roethlisberger*	66.4
4.	2012	Was.	Robert Griffin III*	65.6
5.	2020	Cin.	Joe Burrow	65.3

PASSING YARDS/GAME, ROOKIE QBs, MIN. 200 ATT., NFL HISTORY

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passing Yds/Game
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**289.1**
2.	2012	Ind.	Andrew Luck	273.4
3.	2020	Cin.	Joe Burrow	268.8
4.	2018	Cle.	Baker Mayfield	266.1
5.	2011	Car.	Cam Newton*	253.2

**Won AP Offensive Rookie of the Year*

HERBERT MAKES MNF HISTORY



In his first prime time appearance, **Justin Herbert** posted 264 passing yards and four touchdowns on 20-of-34 passing (58.8 pct.) for a 122.7 passer rating. His four touchdown passes were the most by a rookie in *Monday Night Football* history.

Herbert threw for three touchdowns and a 134.3 passer rating in the first half — good for the most touchdown passes and the second-best passer rating in the first half in *Monday Night Football* history.

MOST SINGLE-GAME TOUCHDOWN PASSES, ROOKIE QBs, *MONDAY NIGHT FOOTBALL* HISTORY

Rank	Season	Team	Player	Passing TD
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**4**
2.	2016	Dal.	Dak Prescott	3
	2013	NYJ	Geno Smith	3
	1983	Mia.	Dan Marino	3

WHAT A START TO A CAREER

Justin Herbert topped 300 passing yards and threw a touchdown for the second-straight game in 2020's Week 3. The performance made Herbert just the third quarterback in NFL history to throw for 300-plus yards in each of his first two career games. The other two (Cam Newton and Kyler Murray) won Offensive Rookie of the Year honors from *The Associated Press*.

PLAYERS WITH 300-PLUS PASSING YARDS, FIRST TWO CAREER GAMES, NFL HISTORY

Season	Team	Player	Pass Yds	300-Yd Games
2020	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**641**	**2**
2019	Ari.	Kyler Murray*	657	2
2011	Car.	Cam Newton*	854	2

**Won AP Offensive Rookie of the Year*

In his NFL debut in Week 2 last season, Herbert made the first start of his career, leading the team on an eight-play, 79-yard game-opening drive capped by his own four-yard touchdown run. Herbert's scoring run made him the first quarterback since at least the 1970 merger to start in an NFL debut and run in a touchdown on the team's opening drive.

Later in the half, Herbert found WR **Jalen Guyton** for a 14-yard score. With that score, Herbert became the first player since Giants QB Bob Clatterbuck to have a rushing score and a passing touchdown in the first half of an NFL debut.

PLAYERS WITH RUSHING AND PASSING TD, FIRST HALF, NFL DEBUT, SINCE 1954

Year	Team	Player	Rush TD	Pass TD
2020	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert**	**1**	**1**
1954	NYG	Bob Clatterbuck	1	1

Herbert finished the day with 311 yards, a touchdown and an interception on 22-of-33 passing (66.7 pct.) for a 94.4 passer rating. His 311 yards were the fourth-most by a quarterback in an NFL debut since the 1970 merger. With the rushing score, Herbert became the just the third player to throw for 300-plus yards and rush for a touchdown in a debut in NFL history.

PLAYERS WITH 300 PASSING YARDS AND A RUSHING TD, NFL DEBUT, NFL HISTORY

Year	Team	Player	Passing Yds	Rush TD
2020	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**311**	**1**
2011	Car.	Cam Newton*	422	1
1950	Cle.	Otto Graham	346	1

MOST PASSING YARDS IN AN NFL DEBUT, SINCE 1970

Rank	Season	Team	Player	Passing Yds
1.	2011	Car.	Cam Newton*	422
2.	1987	Was.	Ed Rubbert	334
3.	2012	Was.	Robert Griffin III*	320
4.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**311**
5.	2005	StL	Ryan Fitzpatrick	310

**Won AP Offensive Rookie of the Year*

JUSTIN HERBERT

A PRIME-TIME PRODIGY

In a pair of starts under the lights, **Justin Herbert** cemented himself as one of the top rookie quarterbacks in prime time since the 1970 NFL-AFL merger. Among rookies with at least two prime-time starts, Herbert's 121.9 passer rating and 289.0 passing yards per game are the best since the merger.

Herbert tossed six touchdowns in prime time, including a record-setting four on *Monday Night Football*. His six passing scores rank second since 1970 among rookies, trailing only Dak Prescott's eight, who made six prime-time starts in his rookie season. Herbert also ranks No. 2 with 8.8 passing yards per attempt and a 9.1 passing touchdown percentage.

PRIME-TIME PASSER RATING, ROOKIE QBs, MIN. TWO PRIME-TIME STARTS, SINCE 1970

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passer Rating
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**121.9**
2.	2004	Pit.	Ben Roethlisberger*	113.6
3.	1998	Det.	Charlie Batch	108.6

PRIME-TIME PASSING YARDS/GAME, ROOKIE QBs, MIN. TWO PRIME-TIME STARTS, SINCE 1970

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passing Yds/Game
1.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**289.0**
2.	1980	Mia.	David Woodley	222.3
3.	2016	Dal.	Dak Prescott*	221.7

PRIME-TIME PASSING TOUCHDOWNS, ROOKIE QBs, MIN. TWO PRIME-TIME STARTS, SINCE 1970

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passing Yds/Att.
1.	2016	Dal.	Dak Prescott*	8
2.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**6**
	2012	Sea.	Russell Wilson	6

PRIME-TIME PASSING YARDS/ATTEMPT, ROOKIE QBs, MIN. TWO PRIME-TIME STARTS, SINCE 1970

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passing Yds/Att.
1.	2004	Pit.	Ben Roethlisberger*	9.8
2.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**8.8**
3.	1998	Det.	Charlie Batch	8.6

PRIME-TIME PASSING TOUCHDOWN PCT., ROOKIE QBs, MIN. TWO PRIME-TIME STARTS, SINCE 2000

Rank	Year	Team	Player	Passing TD Pct.
1.	2012	Sea.	Russell Wilson	9.2
2.	**2020**	**LAC**	**Justin Herbert***	**9.1**
	2017	Hou.	Deshaun Watson	9.1
4.	2004	Pit.	Ben Roethlisberger*	7.7

**Won AP Offensive Rookie of the Year*

AMONG THE LEAGUE LEADERS

In 15 starts, **Justin Herbert** threw for 4,336 passing yards in 2020, ranking No. 6 in the NFL. He averaged 289.1 passing yards per game this season, which ranked fourth in the NFL and No. 3 in the AFC this season among qualified passers.

Herbert not only set the record for passing touchdowns by a rookie, but ranked 10th in the NFL. He also completed a league-high eight passes for 50-plus yards, good for the most by a rookie since at least 1991. Four of those eight passes of 50-plus yards went for touchdowns, tying *The Associated Press* NFL MVP Aaron Rodgers for the most in 2020.

PASSING YARDS/GAME, QUALIFIED PASSERS, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Passing Yards/Game
1.	K.C.	QB Patrick Mahomes	316.0
2.	Hou.	QB Deshaun Watson	301.4
3.	T.B.	QB Tom Brady	289.6
4.	**LAC**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**289.1**
5.	Atl.	QB Matt Ryan	286.3

PASSING TOUCHDOWNS, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Passing Touchdowns
1.	G.B.	QB Aaron Rodgers	48
2.	Sea.	QB Russell Wilson	40
	T.B.	QB Tom Brady	40
4.	K.C.	QB Patrick Mahomes	38
5.	Buf.	QB Josh Allen	37
6.	Min.	QB Kirk Cousins	35
7.	Hou.	QB Deshaun Watson	33
	Pit.	QB Ben Roethlisberger	33
	Ten.	QB Ryan Tannehill	33
10.	**LAC**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**31**

COMPLETIONS OF 50-PLUS YARDS, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Completions
1.	**LAC**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**8**
	Ten.	QB Ryan Tannehill	8
3.	Sea.	QB Russell Wilson	6
4.	—	Four Other Players	5

THREADING THE NEEDLE ON THIRD DOWN

Justin Herbert tied for the NFL lead last season with 14 passing scores on third down. He was one of four quarterbacks to have at least 10, joining three Super Bowl MVPs.

Herbert's 14 touchdown passes on third down were the most by a rookie in the last 40 seasons.

THIRD DOWN PASSING TOUCHDOWNS, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Passing Touchdowns
1.	**LAC**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**14**
	T.B.	QB Tom Brady	14
3.	G.B.	QB Aaron Rodgers	12
4.	K.C.	QB Patrick Mahomes	11

JUSTIN HERBERT



MAKING HIS MARK EARLY

Justin Herbert's historic rookie campaign ranks among the best seasons by any quarterback in franchise history. His 66.6 completion percentage was No. 3 in team annals among qualified passers while his 98.3 passer rating ranked seventh. Herbert's 1.7 passing interception percentage tied for the best in Chargers history among qualified passers.

COMPLETION PERCENTAGE, SINGLE SEASON, QUALIFIED PASSERS, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Season	Player	Completion Pct.
1.	2013	QB Philip Rivers	69.5
2.	2018	QB Philip Rivers	68.3
3.	**2020**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**66.6**
4.	2014	QB Philip Rivers	66.5
5.	2015	QB Philip Rivers	66.1

PASSER RATING, SINGLE SEASON, QUALIFIED PASSERS, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Season	Player	Passer Rating
1.	2008	QB Philip Rivers	105.5
2.	2018	QB Philip Rivers	105.5
3.	2013	QB Philip Rivers	105.5
4.	2004	QB Drew Brees	104.8
5.	2009	QB Philip Rivers	104.4
6.	2010	QB Philip Rivers	101.8
7.	**2020**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**98.3**

PASSING INTERCEPTION PERCENTAGE, SINGLE SEASON, QUALIFIED PASSERS, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Season	Player	Passing INT Pct.
1.	**2020**	**QB Justin Herbert**	**1.7**
	1993	QB John Friesz	1.7
3.	2017	QB Philip Rivers	1.7
4.	2004	QB Drew Brees	1.8
5.	2009	QB Philip Rivers	1.9

HERBERT'S BIG DAYS

Justin Herbert topped 300 passing yards eight times in 2020, the most by a rookie in NFL history. His six games with three-plus touchdown passes are also tops in league annals by a rookie.

300-YARD PASSING OUTPUTS — 8

Date	Opp.	Cmp-Att	Yards	TD	Rating
Sept. 20, 2020	vs. K.C.	22-33	311	1	94.4
Sept. 27, 2020	vs. Car.	35-49	330	1	88.0
Oct. 25, 2020	vs. Jax.	27-43	347	3	111.3
Nov. 8, 2020	vs. L.V.	28-42	326	2	105.9
Nov. 22, 2020	vs. NYJ	37-49	366	3	116.5
Nov. 29, 2020	at Buf.	31-52	316	1	75.5
Dec. 17, 2020	at L.V.	22-32	314	2	121.1
Jan. 3, 2021	at K.C.	22-31	302	3	134.1

THREE-TOUCHDOWN PASSING OUTPUTS — 6

Date	Opp.	Cmp-Att	Yards	TD	Rating
Oct. 4, 2020	at T.B.	20-25	290	3	137.9
Oct. 12, 2020	at N.O.	20-34	264	4	122.7
Oct. 25, 2020	vs. Jax.	27-43	347	3	111.3
Nov. 1, 2020	at Den.	29-43	278	3	89.1
Nov. 22, 2020	vs. NYJ	37-49	366	3	116.5
Jan. 3, 2021	at K.C.	22-31	302	3	134.1

TARGET ACQUIRED

Justin Herbert has thrown touchdowns to nine players, including eight with multiple scores. The first of his career went to **Jalen Guyton**, who caught the first touchdown of his career on the play.

HERBERT'S CAREER TOUCHDOWN PASSES BY RECEIVER

Receiver	Touchdown Passes
WR Keenan Allen	8
WR Mike Williams	5
TE Hunter Henry	4
WR Jalen Guyton	3
WR Tyron Johnson	3
TE Donald Parham Jr.	3
RB Austin Ekeler	2
FB Gabe Nabers	2
TE Virgil Green	1
Total (Nine Receivers)	**31**

KEENAN ALLEN



A PERENNIAL PRO BOWLER

With prolific seasons each of the last four seasons, **Keenan Allen** earned four-straight Pro Bowl nods as one the top receivers in football. He is one of four receivers to be named an all-star each of the last four seasons, joining Davante Adams, Tyreek Hill and DeAndre Hopkins. Allen topped 95 receptions in each of those seasons, becoming just the the fourth player in NFL history to do so in four-straight years.

CONSECUTIVE SEASONS WITH 95-PLUS RECEPTIONS, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team	Player	No. of Seasons
1.	Pit.	WR Antonio Brown	6 (2013-18)
2.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**4 (2017-Present)**
	Hou./Ari.	WR DeAndre Hopkins	4 (2017-Present)
	Ind.	WR Marvin Harrison	4 (1999-2002)
	S.F.	WR Jerry Rice	4 (1993-96)

Since 2017, Allen ranks No. 3 in the NFL in receptions and sixth in receiving yards. He joins DeAndre Hopkins and Michael Thomas as the only players with over 400 receptions in that span, hauling in 100 passes in three of those four seasons.

RECEPTIONS LEADERS, NFL, SINCE 2017

Rank	Team/s	Player	Receptions
1.	Hou./Ari.	WR DeAndre Hopkins	430
2.	N.O.	WR Michael Thomas	418
3.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**403**
4.	K.C.	TE Travis Kelce	388
5.	G.B.	WR Davante Adams	383

RECEIVING YARDS LEADERS, NFL, SINCE 2017

Rank	Team/s	Player	Receiving Yards
1.	Hou./Ari.	WR DeAndre Hopkins	5,522
2.	Atl./Ten.	WR Julio Jones	5,286
3.	K.C.	TE Travis Kelce	5,019
4.	N.O.	WR Michael Thomas	4,813
5.	K.C.	WR Tyreek Hill	4,798
6.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**4,780**

A HISTORIC TRACK RECORD

Keenan Allen hauled in nine passes in his 99th career game in 2020's Week 14 win against Atlanta, setting an all-time record for the most catches through the first 100 games of a career. Allen added a catch in the 100th game of his career to add to his record-setting mark. Allen had 556 catches in his first 90 career games, good for the third-most in NFL history.

RECEPTIONS, FIRST 100 CAREER GAMES, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team/s	Player	Rec.
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**624**
2.	Pit.	WR Antonio Brown	622
3.	Atl.	WR Julio Jones	619
4.	Ari./Bal.	WR Anquan Boldin	614
5.	Ind.	WR Marvin Harrison	591

With a team-record 16 receptions in the Week 11 win against the New York Jets, Allen tied as the fastest player in NFL history to reach 600 career receptions with Antonio Brown (96 games).

Allen not only made team history with a record-setting 16 catches in the Bolts' Week 11 win, he also set an NFL record by registering his sixth career game of 13-plus receptions. Allen also became the fifth player in NFL history with multiple performances of 15 or more catches.

FEWEST GAMES TO 600 RECEPTIONS, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team/s	Player	Games
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**96**
	Pit.	WR Antonio Brown	96
3.	Atl.	WR Julio Jones	97
4.	Ari./Bal.	WR Anquan Boldin	98

MOST GAMES WITH 13-PLUS RECEPTIONS, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team	Player	Games
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**6**
2.	N.E.	WR Wes Welker	5
	Pit.	WR Antonio Brown	5

MOST GAMES WITH 15-PLUS RECEPTIONS, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team	Player	Games
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**2**
	Dal.	TE Jason Witten	2
	Den.	WR Brandon Marshall	2
	N.E.	WR Wes Welker	2
	Pit.	WR Antonio Brown	2

KEENAN ALLEN

THIRD-DOWN PHENOM

Keenan Allen has been the NFL's top receiver on third down since 2017, totaling 118 catches for 1,578 yards and moving the chains on 98 of those receptions — all of which are NFL highs. He ranks tied for No. 2 over that span with 12 touchdown grabs on third down.

Despite missing the last two games of 2020 due to injury, Allen still led the NFL this season in receptions, receiving first downs and touchdown catches on third down.

THIRD DOWN RECEPTIONS, NFL, SINCE 2017

Rank	Team/s	Player	Receptions
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**118**
2.	Hou./Ari.	WR DeAndre Hopkins	104
3.	N.O.	WR Michael Thomas	99
4.	LAR	WR Cooper Kupp	96
5.	Atl.	WR Julio Jones	92

THIRD DOWN RECEIVING YARDS, NFL, SINCE 2017

Rank	Team	Player	Receiving Yards
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**1,578**
2.	LAR	WR Cooper Kupp	1,448
3.	G.B.	WR Davante Adams	1,358
4.	Hou./Ari.	WR DeAndre Hopkins	1,255
5.	Atl.	WR Julio Jones	1,252
	K.C.	WR Tyreek Hill	1,252

RECEIVING FIRST DOWNS, THIRD DOWN, NFL, SINCE 2017

Rank	Team/s	Player	Rec. First Downs
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**98**
2.	Hou./Ari.	WR DeAndre Hopkins	83
3.	LAR	WR Cooper Kupp	76
4.	Atl.	WR Julio Jones	75
	N.O.	WR Michael Thomas	75

THIRD DOWN RECEPTIONS, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Receptions
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**33**
2.	Pit.	WR JuJu Smith-Schuster	32
3.	G.B.	WR Davante Adams	29
4.	—	Four Other Players	28

RECEIVING FIRST DOWNS, THIRD DOWN, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Rec. First Downs
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**28**
2.	G.B.	WR Davante Adams	24
	Pit.	WR JuJu Smith-Schuster	24
4.	—	Four Other Players	22

RECEIVING TOUCHDOWNS, THIRD DOWN, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Receiving TDs
1.	**LAC**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**6**
2.	K.C.	WR Tyreek Hill	5
3.	—	Seven Other Players	4

TRIPLE-THREAT

From Weeks 11-13 in 2017, **Keenan Allen** became the first player in NFL history to post a streak of three-consecutive games with 10-plus receptions, 100-plus receiving yards and at least one TD catch.

KEENAN ALLEN RECEIVING STATS, WEEK 11-13, 2017

Week	Date	Opp.	Rec.	Yds	Avg.	Lg	TD
11	Nov. 19, 2017	vs. Buf.	12	159	13.3	29	2
12	Nov. 23, 2017	at Dal.	11	172	15.6	42t	1
13	Dec. 3, 2017	vs. Cle.	10	105	10.5	26	1

Allen capped off the season with an INT in the road finale at the New York Jets. The pick made him the first player in NFL history to have 90-plus catches and an INT in the same season. Allen also joined Hall of Famers Don Hutson (1942) and Randy Moss (2009) as the third player in league annals to register 1,000-plus receiving yards and an INT in the same season.

PLAYERS WITH 1,000 RECEIVING YARDS AND AN INT, SINGLE SEASON, NFL HISTORY

Year	Team	Player	Rec.	Rec. Yds	INTs
2017	**LAC**	**Keenan Allen**	**102**	**1,393**	**1**
2009	N.E.	Randy Moss*	83	1,264	1
1942	G.B.	Don Hutson*	74	1,211	7

**Pro Football Hall of Famer*



KEENAN ALLEN

KEENAN KEEPS CLIMBING

Keenan Allen's first catch in Week 10 of the 2020 season made him the franchise leader in receptions among wide receivers, passing Hall of Famer **Charlie Joiner** in the process. Allen now ranks No. 2 in team annals behind TE **Antonio Gates** with 624 career receptions. Four of the top six pass catchers in team annals are in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. Gates, the NFL-record holder for most touchdown catches by a tight end, will be eligible for enshrinement in 2023.

Last season, Allen also moved to fifth on the team's receiving yards list and No. 2 on the team's all-time 100-yard receiving performances. Allen leads all Chargers in history with 12 games with 10-plus receptions.

CAREER RECEPTIONS, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Years	Player	Receptions
1.	2003-18	TE Antonio Gates	955
2.	**2013-Present**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**624**
3.	1976-86	WR Charlie Joiner*	586
4.	1979-87	TE Kellen Winslow*	541
5.	2001-09	RB LaDainian Tomlinson*	530
6.	1962-70	WR Lance Alworth*	493

**Pro Football Hall of Famer*

CAREER RECEIVING YARDS, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Years	Player	Receiving Yards
1.	2003-18	TE Antonio Gates	11,841
2.	1962-70	WR Lance Alworth	9,584
3.	1976-86	WR Charlie Joiner	9,203
4.	1966-76	WR Gary Garrison	7,533
5.	**2013-Present**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**7,397**
6.	1979-87	TE Kellen Winslow	6,741

Allen now holds three of the four 100-catch seasons in team history and Allen was the 13th player in NFL history to have three 100-catch seasons.

RECEPTIONS, SINGLE SEASON, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Season	Player	Receptions
1.	2019	WR Keenan Allen	104
	2017	WR Keenan Allen	102
3.	**2020**	**WR Keenan Allen**	**100**
	2003	RB LaDainian Tomlinson	100

KEEPING IT 100

Keenan Allen registered his fourth 100-yard performance of 2020 in Week 11 against the New York Jets. In the victory, he recorded his ninth career game with 10-plus catches, 100-plus yards and a touchdown reception. Allen's seven 100-yard games in 2017 were the most by a Charger since 1980.

He registered a 100-yard receiving game in his second career postseason game as a rookie, becoming the first Chargers rookie to top 100 receiving yards in a postseason contest.

REGULAR-SEASON 100-YARD RECEIVING GAMES — 27

Date	Opp.	Rec.	Yds	Avg.	Lg	TD
Oct. 6, 2013	at Oak.	6	115	19.2	30	1
Oct. 14, 2013	vs. Ind.	9	107	11.9	22t	1
Nov. 3, 2013	at Was.	8	128	16.0	22	1
Nov. 24, 2013	at K.C.	9	124	13.8	29	0
Dec. 1, 2013	vs. Cin.	8	106	13.3	22	0
Sept. 28, 2014	vs. Jax.	10	135	13.5	24	0
Nov. 23, 2014	vs. StL	6	104	17.3	35	1
Nov. 30, 2014	at Bal.	11	121	11.0	23t	2
Sept. 13, 2015	vs. Det.	15	166	11.1	21	0
Sept. 27, 2015	at Min.	12	133	11.1	34t	2
Oct. 18, 2015	at G.B.	14	157	11.2	38	0
Sept. 17, 2017	vs. Mia.	9	100	11.1	24	0
Oct. 1, 2017	vs. Phi.	5	138	27.6	50	0
Nov. 19, 2017	vs. Buf.	12	159	13.3	29	2
Nov. 23, 2017	at Dal.	11	172	15.6	42t	1
Dec. 3, 2017	vs. Cle.	10	105	10.5	26	1
Dec. 10, 2017	vs. Was.	6	111	18.5	51	0
Dec. 31, 2017	vs. Oak.	9	133	14.8	28	1
Sept. 9, 2018	vs. K.C.	8	108	13.5	23	1
Nov. 4, 2018	at Sea.	6	124	20.7	54	0
Dec. 2, 2018	at Pit.	14	148	10.6	21	1
Sept. 8, 2019	vs. Ind.	8	123	15.4	28t	1
Sept. 22, 2019	vs. Hou.	13	183	14.1	34	2
Sept. 27, 2020	vs. Car.	13	132	10.2	22	1
Oct. 25, 2020	vs. Jax.	10	125	12.5	27	0
Nov. 8, 2020	vs. L.V.	9	103	11.4	27t	1
Nov. 22, 2020	vs. NYJ	16	145	9.1	21	1

POSTSEASON 100-YARD RECEIVING GAMES — 1

Date	Opp.	Rec.	Yds	Avg.	Lg	TD
Jan. 12, 2014*	at Den.	6	142	23.7	49	2

**AFC Divisional*

AUSTIN EKELER

HANDS TEAM

Austin Ekeler is one of the most dynamic receiving backs in the NFL. He is now just two touchdown grabs away from setting the record for most receiving scores by an undrafted running back in the common draft era (since 1967).

RECEIVING TDS, UNDRAFTED RBs, NFL, SINCE 1967

Rank	Team/s	Player	Receiving TDs
1.	NYJ/N.E./S.D./Bal.	Danny Woodhead	17
2.	**LAC**	**Austin Ekeler**	**16**
	Cle./Was.	Mike Sellers	16
4.	Hou./Mia.	Arian Foster	14

With six receiving touchdowns this year, **Austin Ekeler** can set the NFL record for the most scoring grabs by a running back in their first five seasons in the common draft era (since 1967).

RECEIVING TDs THROUGH FIRST FIVE SEASONS, RBs, NFL, SINCE 1967

Rank	Team/s	Player	Receiving TDs
1.	Min.	Chuck Foreman	21
2.	N.E.	James White	19
3.	Phi.	Brian Westbrook	18
4.	**LAC**	**Austin Ekeler**	**16**
	K.C./Cle.	Kareem Hunt	16
	Car.	Christian McCaffrey	16

100 MILES AND RUNNIN'

In the team's 45-10 win over Jacksonville last season, **Austin Ekeler** recorded the 35th 100-yard rushing and 100-yard receiving performance in league annals on just 12 offensive touches — the fewest in a 100/100 performance in NFL history.

Ekeler's effort was the fourth such performance by an undrafted running back in the common draft era (since 1967) and the third in team history (second by a Charger in the regular season.)

PLAYERS WITH 100 RUSHING YARDS AND 100 RECEIVING YARDS, SINGLE GAMES, MAX. 15 TOUCHES, NFL HISTORY

Year	Team	Player	Rush Yds	Rec. Yds	Touches
2019	**LAC**	**Austin Ekeler**	**101**	**112**	**12**
1986	Dal.	Herschel Walker	122	170	15
1954	ChiC*	Ollie Matson	115	161	15

**Chicago Cardinals*

PLAYERS WITH 100 RUSHING YARDS AND 100 RECEIVING YARDS, SINGLE GAMES, CHARGERS HISTORY

Year	Player	Rush Att	Rush Yds	Rec.	Rec. Yds
2019	**Austin Ekeler**	**8**	**101**	**4**	**112**
1985	Lionel James	12	127	5	118
1963	Keith Lincoln*	13	206	7	123

**Only postseason 100/100 performance in pro football history*



AN OLD HEAD ON YOUNG SHOULDERS

With the 15th touchdown reception of his career in the Week 16 victory last year, **Austin Ekeler** became the fourth running back in the common draft era (since 1967) to eclipse 15 receiving scores before turning 26-years-old. He has a chance to be the second running back in that span to haul in 20 career touchdowns before turning 27-years-old.

YOUNGEST TO REACH 20 CAREER RECEIVING TDs, RUNNING BACKS, COMMON DRAFT ERA (SINCE 1967)

Rank	Team	Player	Age (Years-Days)
1.	Min.	Chuck Foreman	26-333
—	Car.	Christian McCaffrey	25-86*
—	K.C./Cle.	Kareem Hunt	26-26*
—	N.O.	Alvin Kamara	26-38*
—	**LAC**	**Austin Ekeler**	**26-107***

**Age as of Sept. 1, 2021*

YOUNGEST TO REACH 15 CAREER RECEIVING TDs, RUNNING BACKS, COMMON DRAFT ERA (SINCE 1967)

Rank	Team	Player	Age (Years-Days)
1.	Car.	Christian McCaffrey	23-170
2.	Min.	Chuck Foreman	25-42
3.	**LAC**	**Austin Ekeler**	**25-224**
4.	Buf.	Joe Cribbs	25-312

AUSTIN EKELER

ELECTRIC EKELER

Now in his fifth season, **Austin Ekeler** has established himself as one of the best receiving running backs in Chargers history. He already has set the all-time Chargers record for receiving touchdowns by a running back and can continue to move further up the team record books for receptions and receiving yards by a running back.

CAREER RECEPTIONS, RBs, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Years	Player	Receptions
1.	2001-09	LaDainian Tomlinson	530
2.	1990-95	Ronnie Harmon	378
3.	1995-2002	Terrell Fletcher	259
4.	2015-19	Melvin Gordon III	224
5.	**2017-Present**	**Austin Ekeler**	**212**

CAREER RECEIVING YARDS, RBs, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Years	Player	Receiving Yards
1.	2001-09	LaDainian Tomlinson	3,955
2.	1990-95	Ronnie Harmon	3,939
3.	**2017-Present**	**Austin Ekeler**	**2,079**
4.	1990-95	Ronnie Harmon	1,978

CAREER RECEIVING TDs, RBs, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Years	Player	Receiving TDs
1.	**2017-Present**	**Austin Ekeler**	**16**
2.	2001-09	LaDainian Tomlinson	15
3.	1961-66, '68	Keith Lincoln	14

KEEPING IT 100

Austin Ekeler enters the 2021 season as the lead back for the Bolts again after producing his first 100-yard rushing performance and three games with 100-plus receiving yards in 2019 to set a team record for career 100-yard receiving games by a running back.

100-YARD RUSHING OUTPUTS — 1

Date	Opp.	Att	Yds	Avg.	Lg	TD
Dec. 8, 2019	at Jax.	8	101	12.6	35	0

100-YARD RECEIVING OUTPUTS — 3

Date	Opp.	Rec.	Yds	Avg.	Lg	TD
Oct. 20, 2019	at Ten.	7	118	16.9	41t	1
Nov. 18, 2019	vs. K.C.	8	108	13.5	37	0
Dec. 8, 2019	at Jax.	4	112	28.0	84t	1

EKELER EFFICIENT AS EVER

Austin Ekeler's 93 rushing yards in 2020's Week 2 game put him over 1,500 career rushing yards. Ekeler hit the milestone on his 473rd career offensive touch, the third-fewest amount of touches that it's taken an NFL running back to hit the accolade since the 1970 NFL-AFL merger.

NFL RBs TO REACH 1,500 RUSHING YARDS AND 1,500 RECEIVING YARDS, FEWEST TOUCHES, SINCE 1970

Rank	Team	Player	Touches
1.	N.O.	Alvin Kamara	470
2.	Dal.	Herschel Walker	471
3.	**LAC**	**Austin Ekeler**	**473**

By eclipsing the mark in his 48th career game, Ekeler broke Arian Foster's record for the fewest games played by an undrafted running back to reach 1,500 career rushing yards and 1,500 career receiving yards since the merger.

UNDRAFTED RBs TO REACH 1,500 RUSHING YARDS AND 1,500 RECEIVING YARDS, FEWEST GAMES, NFL, SINCE 1970

Rank	Team	Player	Games
1.	**LAC**	**Austin Ekeler**	**48**
2.	Hou.	Arian Foster	50



JOEY BOSA



NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOEY

Since entering the NFL in 2016, **Joey Bosa** has been an absolute force, recording the sixth-best sacks-per-game over that span (min. 50 games played).

SACKS PER GAME, MIN. 50 GAMES PLAYED, SINCE 2016

Rank	Team	Player	GP	Sacks/Game
1.	Ari.	OLB Chandler Jones	69	0.88
2.	LAR	DT Aaron Donald	78	0.84
3.	Cle.	DE Myles Garrett	51	0.83
4.	Pit.	LB T.J. Watt	62	0.80
5.	Min.	DE Danielle Hunter	64	0.76
6.	**LAC**	**OLB Joey Bosa**	**63**	**0.75**

Bosa has also been one of the top-producing pass rushers since entering the NFL. His 47.5 career sacks rank No. 8 over that span.

SACKS LEADERS, NFL, SINCE 2016

Rank	Team	Player	Sacks
1.	LAR	DT Aaron Donald	65.5
2.	Ari.	OLB Chandler Jones	61.0
3.	N.O.	DE Cameron Jordan	55.5
4.	Oak./Chi.	LB Khalil Mack	51.5
5.	Pit.	LB T.J. Watt	49.5
6.	Min.	DE Danielle Hunter	48.5
7.	Was./Phi.	DE Ryan Kerrigan	48.0
8.	**LAC**	**OLB Joey Bosa**	**47.5**

ONE OF A KIND

With 8.5 sacks in his first eight games of 2017, **Joey Bosa** brought his career total to 19.0 sacks over his first 20 career games. That topped the previous NFL record of 18.5 set by Aldon Smith in 2012.

SACKS, FIRST 20 CAREER GAMES, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team	Player	Sacks
1.	**Chargers**	**DE Joey Bosa**	**19.0**
2.	49ers	LB Aldon Smith	18.5
3.	Packers	LB Clay Matthews	17.0

A PRO BOWL PASS RUSHER

In 2020, **Joey Bosa** was named a Pro Bowler for the third time in his career. Despite missing a pair of games, Bosa's 15 tackles for loss and 27 QB hits each ranked No. 2 in the AFC that season. Bosa became the third Charger defender to be selected to three Pro Bowls over the first five seasons of a career.

MOST PRO BOWL SELECTIONS, FIRST FIVE SEASONS, DEFENSIVE PLAYERS, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Years	Player	Pro Bowls
1.	1990-94	LB Junior Seau	4
2.	**2016-20**	**DE Joey Bosa**	**3**
	2005-09	LB Shawne Merriman	3

A CAREER-BEST PERFORMANCE

In 2020's Week 12 matchup at Buffalo, **Joey Bosa** set numerous single-game career highs — nine tackles (eight solo), three sacks, six tackles for loss, five quarterback hits, a fumble recovery and a pass defensed. He became just the second player to post three sacks, five tackles for loss, five QB hits and recover a fumble since tackles for loss became a stat in 2008.

PLAYERS WITH THREE SACKS, FIVE QB HITS, FIVE TFLs, FUMBLE RECOVERY, SINGLE GAMES, SINCE 2008

Season	Team	Player	Game
2020	**LAC**	**DE Joey Bosa**	**Nov. 29 at Buf.**
2018	LAR	DT Aaron Donald	Oct. 21 at S.F.

YOUNG AND RESTLESS

Joey Bosa has a shot to be one of the youngest players to reach 60 sacks in history. Arizona's J.J. Watt set the record for the youngest player to reach 60 career sacks in 2015 while with the Texans at 26 years, 182 days. If Bosa records 12.5 sacks over the course of this season, he will be the youngest player in NFL history to eclipse 60 career sacks.

YOUNGEST PLAYERS TO REACH 60 SACKS, NFL HISTORY

Rank	Team	Player	Age (Years-Days)
1.	Texans	DE J.J. Watt	26-182
2.	Chiefs	LB Derrick Thomas	26-275
3.	Broncos	OLB Von Miller	26-283
4.	Eagles	DE Reggie White	26-316
—	**Chargers**	**OLB Joey Bosa**	**26-63***

**Age as of Sept. 12, 2021*

JOEY BOSA

BOSA'S SACKS BY QUARTERBACK

In 2020's Week 12 matchup at Buffalo, **Joey Bosa** set a single-game career high with three sacks. The career-best performance brought Bosa to 47.5 for his career. Below is a look at his career regular-season sacks by quarterback:

BOSA'S REGULAR-SEASON CAREER SACKS BY QB (47.5)

Sacks	Player	Most Recent Sack
6.0	Derek Carr	Dec. 22, 2019 vs. Oak.
3.5	Trevor Siemian	Oct. 22, 2017 vs. Den.
2.5	Gardner Minshew II	Oct. 25, 2020 vs. Jax.
	Josh Rosen	Sept. 29, 2019 at Mia.
2.0	Josh Allen	Nov. 29, 2020 at Buf.
	Robert Griffin III	Dec. 24, 2016 at Cle.
	Eli Manning	Oct. 8, 2015 at NYG
	Matt Ryan	Oct. 23, 2016 at Atl.
	Alex Smith	Sept. 24, 2017 vs. K.C.
	Ryan Tannehill	Oct. 20, 2019 at Ten.
	Mitchell Trubisky	Oct. 27, 2019 at Chi.
1.5	Aaron Rodgers	Nov. 3, 2019 vs. G.B.
1.0	Matt Barkley	Nov. 29, 2020 at Buf.
	Blake Bortles	Nov. 12, 2017 at Jax.
	Tom Brady	Oct. 29, 2017 at N.E.
	Drew Brees	Oct. 12, 2020 at N.O.
	Teddy Bridgewater	Sept. 27, 2020 vs. Car.
	Jacoby Brissett	Sept. 8, 2019 vs. Ind.
	Joe Burrow	Sept. 13, 2020 at Cin.
	Jeff Driskel	Dec. 9, 2018 vs. Cin.
	Joe Flacco	Oct. 6, 2019 vs. Den.
	Case Keenum	Dec. 30, 2017 at Den.
	DeShone Kizer	Dec. 3, 2017 vs. Cle.
	Patrick Mahomes	Sept. 20, 2020 vs. K.C.
	Cam Newton	Dec. 11, 2016 at Car.
	Ben Roethlisberger	Dec. 2, 2018 at Pit.
	Tyrod Taylor	Nov. 19, 2017 vs. Buf.
	Jameis Winston	Dec. 4, 2016 vs. T.B.
0.5	Lamar Jackson	Dec. 22, 2018 vs. Bal.
	Brock Osweiler	Nov. 27, 2016 at Hou.
	Deshaun Watson	Sept. 22, 2019 vs. Hou.

BRING THE HEAT

OLB **Joey Bosa** ranks fifth for sacks in team history. He's closing in on 50 sacks for his career. If Bosa can eclipse that mark within the first six games of the season, he will have done so faster than any player in Chargers history.

CAREER SACKS LEADERS, CHARGERS HISTORY SINCE 1982

Rank	Years	Player	Sacks
1.	1986-95	DE Leslie O'Neal	105.5
2.	2004-12	LB Shaun Phillips	69.5
3.	1984-90	DE Lee Williams	65.5
4.	2012-20	DE Melvin Ingram III	49.0
5.	**2016-Present**	**OLB Joey Bosa**	**47.5**
6.	1990-2002	LB Junior Seau	47.0

FEWEST GAMES TO 50 SACKS, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Years	Player	Games
1.	1986-91	DE Leslie O'Neal	70
2.	1984-89	DE Lee Williams	75
3.	2004-10	LB Shaun Phillips	96
—	**2016-Present**	**OLB Joey Bosa**	**63**



OTHER PLAYER NOTES

WILLIAMS ABOVE AVERAGE

Since entering the NFL in 2017, wide receiver **Mike Williams** has 151 catches for 2,516 yards for a career receiving average of 16.7 yards. His career average is the third-best in the NFL since 2017 among players with at least 100 catches. Williams' 20.4 average in 2019 is still the best in a single-season over that span (min. 40 rec.).

RECEIVING AVG. LEADERS, MIN. 100 REC., NFL, SINCE 2017

Rank	Team	Player	Receiving Avg.
1.	Ten.	WR A.J. Brown	17.4
2.	Det.	WR Kenny Golladay	16.8
3.	**LAC**	**WR Mike Williams**	**16.7**

RECEIVING AVERAGE LEADERS, SINGLE SEASON, MIN. 40 RECEPTIONS, NFL, SINCE 2017

Rank	Season	Team	Player	Rec. Avg.
1.	**2019**	**LAC**	**WR Mike Williams**	**20.4**
2.	2019	Ten.	WR A.J. Brown	20.2
3.	2018	T.B.	WR DeSean Jackson	18.9

DIAL IT UP DEEP

Last season, WR **Tyron Johnson** posted 20 catches for 398 yards (19.9 avg.) and three touchdowns. He ranked No. 2 the NFL in receiving average (min. 15 rec.). Teammate **Jalen Guyton** finished the season fourth by averaging 18.3 yards per catch.

Four of Johnson's receptions went for 50-plus yards, the most in the NFL in 2020. Guyton was tied for second with three on the year and hauled in two scores of 70-plus yards, tied for the second most in a season in team annals.

RECEIVING AVERAGE LEADERS, MIN. 15 REC., NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Receiving Avg.
1.	G.B.	WR Marquez Valdes-Scantling	20.9
2.	**LAC**	**WR Tyron Johnson**	**19.9**
3.	L.V.	WR Nelson Agholor	18.7
4.	**LAC**	**WR Jalen Guyton**	**18.3**
5.	Car.	WR D.J. Moore	18.1

RECEPTIONS OF 50-PLUS YARDS, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Receptions
1.	**LAC**	**WR Tyron Johnson**	**4**
2.	**LAC**	**WR Jalen Guyton**	**3**
	—	Seven Other Players	3

RECEIVING TOUCHDOWNS OF 70-PLUS YARDS, SINGLE SEASON, CHARGERS HISTORY

Rank	Season	Player	No.
1.	1968	WR Lance Alworth	3
2.	**2020**	**WR Jalen Guyton**	**2**
	2017	WR Tyrell Williams	2
	2000	WR Jeff Graham	2
	1964	WR Lance Alworth	2
	1963	WR Lance Alworth	2
	1961	WR Dave Kocourek	2

RUNNING DOWN A DREAM



Joshua Kelley ended 2020's Week 1 win with 60 rushing yards and a TD on 12 carries (5.0 avg.). The fourth-round rookie and L.A. County native became just the sixth Charger in the Super Bowl Era (since 1966) to have a rushing score in his NFL debut, and the first since Hall of Fame RB LaDainian Tomlinson did so in 2001.

CHARGERS RBs WITH RUSHING TD IN NFL DEBUT, SUPER BOWL ERA (SINCE 1966)

Date	Opponent	Player	Rush TDs
Sept. 13, 2020	**at Cincinnati**	**Joshua Kelley**	**1**
Sept. 9, 2001	vs. Washington	LaDainian Tomlinson	2
Sept. 10, 1989	at L.A. Raiders	Marion Butts	2
Sept. 8, 1985	at Buffalo	Curtis Adams	1
Sept. 7, 1981	at Cleveland	James Brooks	1
Sept. 15, 1974	at Houston	Glen Bonner	1

MURRAY AMONG ROOKIE TACKLE LEADERS

Kenneth Murray Jr. was one of three rookies last year to eclipse 100 tackles, ranking No. 2 with 107 this season. He set the record for the most by a Chargers rookie since 2000.

ROOKIE TACKLE LEADERS, NFL, 2020

Rank	Team	Player	Total Tackles
1.	Car.	S Jeremy Chinn	116
2.	**LAC**	**LB Kenneth Murray Jr.**	**107**
3.	Bal.	LB Patrick Queen	105

CHARGERS ROOKIE TACKLE LEADERS, SINCE 2000

Rank	Season	Player	Total Tackles
1.	**2020**	**LB Kenneth Murray Jr.**	**107**
2.	2018	S Derwin James Jr.	105
3.	2016	LB Jatavis Brown	76

2020 LOS ANGELES CHARGERS OFFENSIVE STATISTICS

Won 7, Lost 9

9/13/2020	W	16 - 13	at Cincinnati Bengals
9/20/2020	L	20 - 23	Kansas City Chiefs
9/27/2020	L	16 - 21	Carolina Panthers
10/4/2020	L	31 - 38	at Tampa Bay Buccaneers
10/12/2020	L	27 - 30	at New Orleans Saints
10/25/2020	W	39 - 29	Jacksonville Jaguars
11/1/2020	L	30 - 31	at Denver Broncos
11/8/2020	L	26 - 31	Las Vegas Raiders
11/15/2020	L	21 - 29	at Miami Dolphins
11/22/2020	W	34 - 28	New York Jets
11/29/2020	L	17 - 27	at Buffalo Bills
12/6/2020	L	0 - 45	New England Patriots
12/13/2020	W	20 - 17	Atlanta Falcons
12/17/2020	W	30 - 27	at Las Vegas Raiders
12/27/2020	W	19 - 16	Denver Broncos
1/3/2021	W	38 - 21	at Kansas City Chiefs

	Los Angeles Chargers	Opponent
Total First Downs	**373**	**324**
Rushing	111	112
Passing	226	186
Penalty	36	26
3rd Down: Made/Att	99/224	89/204
3rd Down Pct.	44.2%	43.6%
4th Down: Made/Att	12/25	10/15
4th Down Pct.	48.0%	66.7%
Possession Avg.	**31:14**	**28:46**
Total Net Yards	**6113**	**5495**
Avg. Per Game	382.1	343.4
Total Plays	1127	997
Avg. Per Play	5.4	5.5
Net Yards Rushing	**1784**	**1917**
Avg. Per Game	111.5	119.8
Total Rushes	466	427
Net Yards Passing	4329	3578
Avg. Per Game	270.6	223.6
Sacked/Yards Lost	34/219	27/137
Gross Yards	4548	3715
Attempts/Completions	627/413	543/340
Completion Pct.	65.9%	62.6%
Had Intercepted	10	12
Punts/Average	**60/44.5**	**61/47.4**
Net Punting Avg.	**34.1**	**42.2**
Penalties/Yards	**85/710**	**94/869**
Fumbles/Ball Lost	**16/6**	**15/7**
Touchdowns	**45**	**49**
Rushing	12	17
Passing	31	29
Returns	2	3

Score By Periods	**Q1**	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**OT**	**Pts**
Team	73	146	89	70	6	384
Opponents	84	111	102	120	9	426

Scoring	**TD**	**Ru**	**Pa**	**Rt**	**PAT**	**FG**	**2Pt**	**Pts**
M.Badgley	0	0	0	0	36/39	24/33	0	108
K.Allen	8	0	8	0	0/0	0/0	1	50
M.Williams	5	0	5	0	0/0	0/0	0	30
J.Herbert	5	5	0	0	0/0	0/0	0	30
H.Henry	4	0	4	0	0/0	0/0	0	24
K.Ballage	3	3	0	0	0/0	0/0	0	18
D.Parham	3	0	3	0	0/0	0/0	0	18
J.Guyton	3	0	3	0	0/0	0/0	0	18
T.Johnson	3	0	3	0	0/0	0/0	0	18
A.Ekeler	3	1	2	0	0/0	0/0	0	18
G.Nabers	2	0	2	0	0/0	0/0	0	12
J.Kelley	2	2	0	0	0/0	0/0	0	12
J.Reed	1	1	0	0	0/0	0/0	0	6
T.Campbell	1	0	0	1	0/0	0/0	0	6
V.Green	1	0	1	0	0/0	0/0	0	6
M.Davis	1	0	0	1	0/0	0/0	0	6
J.Jackson	0	0	0	0	0/0	0/0	1	2
I.Rochell	0	0	0	0	0/0	0/0	0	2
Team	**45**	**12**	**31**	**2**	**36/39**	**24/33**	**2**	**384**
Opponents	**49**	**17**	**29**	**3**	**40/44**	**28/32**	**3**	**426**

2-Pt. Conversions: Team 2/5, Opponents: 3/5

Sacks: J.Bosa 7.5, U.Nwosu 4.5, J.Tillery 3.0, I.Rochell 2.5, N.Vigil 2.0, D.Perryman 1.0, R.Jenkins 1.0, J.Jones 1.0, K.Murray 1.0, D.Square 1.0, D.King 1.0, K.White 0.5, J.Addae 0.5, C.Harris 0.5 **Team: 27.0, Opponents: 34.0**

Rushing	**No.**	**Yds**	**Avg**	**Long**	**TD**
A.Ekeler	116	530	4.6	27	1
J.Kelley	111	354	3.2	33	2
K.Ballage	88	290	3.3	17	3
J.Jackson	59	270	4.6	36	0
J.Herbert	55	234	4.3	31	5
T.Pope	15	76	5.1	26	0
J.Reed	5	29	5.8	8	1
T.Johnson	3	17	5.7	7	0
T.Taylor	6	7	1.2	4	0
G.Nabers	2	7	3.5	4	0
M.Williams	1	1	1.0	1	0
J.Guyton	2	0	0.0	4	0
K.Allen	1	-1	-1.0	-1	0
E.Stick	1	-2	-2.0	-2	0
T.Long	1	-28	-28.0	-28	0
Team	**466**	**1784**	**3.8**	**36**	**12**
Opponents	**427**	**1917**	**4.5**	**55t**	**17**

Receiving	**No.**	**Yds**	**Avg**	**Long**	**TD**
K.Allen	100	992	9.9	28	8
H.Henry	60	613	10.2	33	4
A.Ekeler	54	403	7.5	28	2
M.Williams	48	756	15.8	64t	5
J.Guyton	28	511	18.3	72t	3
J.Kelley	23	148	6.4	35	0
T.Johnson	20	398	19.9	55	3
K.Ballage	20	99	5.0	16	0
J.Jackson	19	173	9.1	34	0
D.Parham	10	159	15.9	26	3
S.Anderson	8	106	13.3	23	0
T.Pope	8	42	5.3	11	0
K.Hill	7	73	10.4	25	0
G.Nabers	5	25	5.0	9	2
V.Green	3	50	16.7	26t	1
J.Reed	0	0	0.0	0	0
Team	**413**	**4548**	**11.0**	**72t**	**31**
Opponents	**340**	**3715**	**10.9**	**54t**	**29**

Interceptions	**No.**	**Yds**	**Avg**	**Long**	**TD**
M.Davis	3	86	28.7	78t	1
R.Jenkins	2	23	11.5	23	0
C.Harris	1	51	51.0	51	0
N.Adderley	1	39	39.0	39	0
C.Hayward	1	9	9.0	9	0
T.Campbell	1	6	6.0	6t	1
J.Addae	1	3	3.0	3	0
M.Williams	1	0	0.0	0	0
M.Ingram	1	0	0.0	0	0
Team	**12**	**217**	**18.1**	**78t**	**2**
Opponents	**10**	**146**	**14.6**	**66**	**0**

Punting	**No**	**Yds**	**Avg**	**Net**	**TB**	**In**	**Lg**	**B**
T.Long	57	2669	46.8	34.1	3	12	63	3
Team	**60**	**2669**	**44.5**	**34.1**	**3**	**12**	**63**	**3**
Opponents	**61**	**2893**	**47.4**	**42.2**	**11**	**26**	**70**	**0**

Punt Returns	**Ret**	**FC**	**Yds**	**Avg**	**Long**	**TD**
K.Hill	12	11	83	6.9	30	0
D.King	6	4	17	2.8	7	0
Team	**18**	**15**	**100**	**5.6**	**30**	**0**
Opponents	**37**	**8**	**564**	**15.2**	**70t**	**1**

Kickoff Returns	**No.**	**Yds**	**Avg**	**Long**	**TD**
J.Reed	21	435	20.7	46	0
N.Adderley	11	318	28.9	76	0
T.Johnson	6	111	18.5	26	0
J.Kelley	2	39	19.5	21	0
T.Pope	1	14	14.0	14	0
K.Hill	1	7	7.0	7	0
Team	**42**	**924**	**22.0**	**76**	**0**
Opponents	**34**	**913**	**26.9**	**44**	**0**

Field Goals	**1-19**	**20-29**	**30-39**	**40-49**	**50+**
M.Badgley	0/ 0	8/ 8	6/ 6	8/ 13	2/ 6
Team	**0/ 0**	**8/ 8**	**6/ 6**	**8/ 13**	**2/ 6**
Opponents	**0/ 0**	**6/ 6**	**9/ 11**	**6/ 8**	**7/ 7**

Fumbles Lost: K.Allen 2, J.Kelley 2, K.Hill Jr. 1, J.Herbert 1 **Total: 6**

Opponent Fumble Recoveries: N.Vigil 2, J.Bosa 1, T.Pope 1, J.Tillery 1, N.Adderley 1, J.Reed 1 **Total: 7**

Passing	**Att**	**Cmp**	**Yds**	**Cmp%**	**Yds/Att**	**TD**	**TD%**	**Int**	**Int%**	**Long**	**Sack**	**Lost**	**Rating**
J.Herbert	595	396	4336	66.6%	7.3	31	5.2%	10	1.7%	72t	32/	218	98.3
T.Taylor	30	16	208	53.3%	6.9	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	37	2/	1	75.4
E.Stick	1	1	4	100.0%	4.0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	4	0/	0	83.3
K.Allen	1	0	0	0.0%	0.0	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0/	0	39.6
Team	**627**	**413**	**4548**	**65.9%**	**7.2**	**31**	**4.9%**	**10**	**1.6%**	**72t**	**34/**	**219**	**97.0**
Opponents	**543**	**340**	**3715**	**62.6%**	**6.8**	**29**	**5.3%**	**12**	**2.2%**	**54t**	**27/**	**137**	**91.4**

2020 LOS ANGELES CHARGERS DEFENSIVE STATISTICS

Official Press Box Totals — Confirmed by league review.

	— Tackles —								— Fumbles —	
Player	**Solo**	**Assisted**	**Total**	**Sacks**	**Yards**	**Tackles for Loss**	**QB Hits**	**Interceptions**	**Passes Def.**	**Forced**	**Recoveries**
Kenneth Murray Jr.	68	39	107	1.0	4.0	5	1	0	3	0	0
Rayshawn Jenkins	56	25	81	1.0	6.0	4	1	2	4	0	0
Kyzir White	50	27	77	0.5	4.5	4	3	0	3	0	0
Nasir Adderley	58	11	69	0.0	0.0	0	1	1	3	0	1
Michael Davis	48	15	63	0.0	0.0	2	0	3	14	0	0
Linval Joseph	33	29	62	0.0	0.0	2	2	0	0	0	0
Denzel Perryman	25	23	48	1.0	9.0	3	2	0	1	1	0
Nick Vigil	26	16	42	2.0	3.0	3	0	0	1	1	2
Casey Hayward Jr.	36	5	41	0.0	0.0	0	0	1	8	0	0
Joey Bosa	29	10	39	7.5	48.0	15	27	0	1	0	1
Chris Harris Jr.	25	12	37	0.5	0.5	1	1	1	2	0	0
Justin Jones	19	15	34	1.0	5.0	5	4	0	0	0	0
Uchenna Nwosu	17	13	30	4.5	26.0	5	11	0	2	0	0
Jerry Tillery	19	11	30	3.0	24.0	3	14	0	2	2	1
Isaac Rochell	16	11	27	2.5	5.5	1	3	0	1	0	0
Desmond King II	18	5	23	1.0	0.0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Damion Square	9	11	20	1.0	1.0	1	2	0	0	0	0
Tevaughn Campbell	14	5	19	0.0	0.0	0	1	1	3	1	0
Jahleel Addae	12	5	17	0.5	0.5	0	1	1	2	0	0
Melvin Ingram III	5	5	10	0.0	0.0	0	4	1	2	0	0
Brandon Facyson	6	1	7	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Jaylen Watkins	7	0	7	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Cortez Broughton	0	4	4	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	1	0	0
Alohi Gilman	1	2	3	0.0	0.0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Emeke Egbule	0	2	2	0.0	0.0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Joe Gaziano	0	1	1	0.0	0.0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Jessie Lemonier	0	1	1	0.0	0.0	0	2	0	0	0	0
Drue Tranquill	1	0	1	0.0	0.0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mike Williams	0	0	0	0.0	0.0	0	0	1	1	0	0
Totals	**598**	**304**	**902**	**27.0**	**137.0**	**54**	**84**	**12**	**54**	**6**	**5**
Defensive Backs	*281*	*86*	*367*	*3.0*	*7.0*	*7*	*7*	*10*	*36*	*2*	*1*
Defensive Linemen	*147*	*111*	*258*	*17.0*	*96.5*	*33*	*70*	*1*	*9*	*2*	*2*
Linebackers	*170*	*107*	*277*	*7.0*	*33.5*	*14*	*7*	*0*	*8*	*2*	*2*
Offensive Players	*0*	*0*	*0*	*0.0*	*0.0*	*0*	*0*	*1*	*1*	*0*	*0*

SPECIAL TEAMS TACKLES

Player	Total Tackles
Brandon Facyson	9
Nick Vigil	8
B.J. Bello	6
Stephen Anderson	5
Emeke Egbule	5
Malik Jefferson	5
Gabe Nabers	5
Jahleel Addae	4
Alohi Gilman	4
Ty Long	4
Cole Mazza	4
Tevaugh Campbell	3
Justin Jackson	3
Rayshawn Jenkins	3
Uchenna Nwosu	3
Joe Reed	3
Cole Christiansen	2
Isaac Rochell	2
Michael Davis	1
Jalen Guyton	1
Tyron Johnson	1
Joshua Kelley	1
Desmond King II	1
Jessie Lemonier	1
Jaylen Watkins	1
Totals	**86**

2021 LOS ANGELES CHARGERS NUMERICAL ROSTER

ACTIVE ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	Age	Exp.	College	Hometown	How Acq.
1	Ty Long	P	6-2	205	28	3	Alabama-Birmingham	Roswell, Ga.	FA-'19
2	Easton Stick	QB	6-1	224	25	3	North Dakota State	Omaha, Neb.	D5-'19
3	KJ Costello	QB	6-5	225	21	3	Mississippi State	Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif.	FA-'21
4	Michael Badgley	K	5-10	183	26	4	Miami	Summit, N.J.	FA-'18
5	Joshua Palmer	WR	6-1	210	21	R	Tennessee	Brampton, Ontario, Canada	D3a-'21
6	Alex Kessman	K	6-2	189	23	R	Pittsburgh	Clarkston, Mich.	FA-'21
7	Chase Daniel	QB	6-0	229	34	12	Missouri	Southlake, Texas	FA-'21
8d	KJ Sails	CB	5-11	180	24	R	South Florida	Tampa, Fla.	FA-'21
8t	Lachlan Edwards	P	6-4	209	29	5	Sam Houston State	Hastings, Victoria, Australia	FA-'20
9	Kenneth Murray Jr.	LB	6-2	241	22	2	Oklahoma	Houston, Texas	D1b-'20
10	Justin Herbert	QB	6-6	236	23	2	Oregon	Eugene, Ore.	D1a-'20
11	Jason Moore Jr.	WR	6-3	215	26	2	Findlay	Oberlin, Ohio	FA-'19
12	Joe Reed	WR	6-0	224	23	2	Virginia	Charlotte Court House, Va.	D5-'20
13	Keenan Allen	WR	6-2	211	29	9	California	Greensboro, N.C.	D3-'13
15	Jalen Guyton	WR	6-1	212	24	2	North Texas	Allen, Texas	FA-'19
16	Tristan Vizcaino	K	6-2	205	25	1	Washington	Chino Hills, Calif.	FA-'21
20	Tevaughn Campbell	CB	6-0	200	28	2	Regina	Toronto, Ontario, Canada	FA-'19
22	Justin Jackson	RB	6-0	200	25	4	Northwestern	Carol Stream, Ill.	D7-'18
23	Ryan Smith	CB	5-11	189	27	6	North Carolina Central	Upper Marlboro, Md.	UFA (TB)-'21
24	Nasir Adderley	S	6-0	206	24	3	Delaware	Philadelphia, Pa.	D2-'19
25	Chris Harris Jr.	CB	5-10	199	32	11	Kansas	Bixby, Okla.	UFA (Den)-'20
26	Asante Samuel Jr.	CB	5-10	180	21	R	Florida State	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	D2-'21
27	Joshua Kelley	RB	5-11	212	23	2	UCLA	Lancaster, Calif.	D4-'20
28	Brandon Facyson	CB	6-2	197	26	4	Virginia Tech	Newnan, Ga.	FA-'18
29	Mark Webb Jr.	DB	6-1	207	22	R	Georgia	Philadelphia, Pa.	D7-'21
30	Austin Ekeler	RB	5-10	200	26	5	Western State Colorado	Eaton, Colo.	FA-'17
31	Nick Niemann	LB	6-3	234	23	R	Iowa	Sycamore, Ill.	D6a-'21
32	Alohi Gilman	S	5-10	201	23	2	Notre Dame	Laie, Hawaii	D6-'20
33	Derwin James Jr.	S	6-2	215	25	4	Florida State	Haines City, Fla.	D1-'18
34	Darius Bradwell	RB	6-0	235	24	1	Tulane	Tallahassee, Fla.	FA-'20
35	Larry Rountree III	RB	5-10	211	22	R	Missouri	Raleigh, N.C.	D6b-'21
36	Michael Bandy	WR	5-10	190	23	1	San Diego	La Mirada, Calif.	FA-'21
37	Kemon Hall	CB	5-11	190	24	1	North Texas	Calhoun City, Miss.	W (Dal)-'21
38	John Brannon	CB	6-0	190	23	1	Western Carolina	Charlotte, N.C.	FA-'20
39	Donte Vaughn	CB	6-2	210	23	1	Notre Dame	Memphis, Tenn.	FA-'20
40	Gabe Nabers	FB	6-3	235	23	2	Florida State	Hahira, Ga.	FA-'20
41	Matt Seybert	TE	6-4	257	24	1	Michigan State	Traverse City, Mich.	FA-'21
42	Uchenna Nwosu	OLB	6-2	251	24	4	Southern California	Carson, Calif.	D2-'18
43	Michael Davis	CB	6-2	196	26	5	Brigham Young	Glendale, Calif.	FA-'17
44	Kyzir White	LB	6-2	216	25	4	West Virginia	Macungie, Pa.	D4-'18
45	Cole Mazza	LS	6-1	247	26	3	Alabama	Bakersfield, Calif.	FA-'19
46	Ben DeLuca	DB	6-1	202	23	R	Charlotte	Orlando, Fla.	FA-'21
47	Hunter Kampmoyer	TE	6-4	243	23	R	Oregon	Bishop, Calif.	FA-'21
48	Matt Sokol	TE	6-5	249	25	1	Michigan State	Rochester, Mich.	FA-'20
49	Drue Tranquill	LB	6-2	234	25	3	Notre Dame	Fort Wayne, Ind.	D4-'19
50	Cole Christiansen	LB	6-1	230	24	1	Army	Suffolk, Va.	FA-'20
51	Emeke Egbule	OLB	6-2	245	24	3	Houston	Houston, Texas	D6-'19
52	Kyler Fackrell	OLB	6-5	245	29	6	Utah State	Mesa, Ariz.	UFA (NYG)-'21
53	Damon Lloyd	LB	6-0	235	23	1	Indiana (Pa.)	Avingdon, Md.	FA-'21
57	Amen Ogbongbemiga	LB	6-0	231	22	R	Oklahoma State	Calgary, Alberta, Canada	FA-'21
58	Jessie Lemonier	OLB	6-2	240	24	2	Liberty	Miami, Fla.	FA-'20
59	Ryan Langan	LS	6-1	237	22	R	Georgia Southern	Cedar Rapids, Neb.	FA-'21
60	Kyle Spalding	T	6-6	299	23	R	San Diego State	McKinleyville, Calif.	FA-'21
61	Scott Quessenberry	C/G	6-3	310	26	4	UCLA	La Costa, Calif.	D5-'18
63	Corey Linsley	C	6-3	301	30	8	Ohio State	Boardman, Ohio	UFA (GB)-'21
64	Brenden Jaimes	G/T	6-5	300	23	R	Nebraska	Austin, Texas	D5-'21
65	Nate Gilliam	G	6-4	310	24	1	Wake Forest	Knoxville, Tenn.	FA-'20
66	Forrest Merrill	DL	6-0	322	24	R	Arkansas State	Willard, Mo.	FA-'21
67	Ryan Hunter	G	6-3	316	26	1	Bowling Green	North Bay, Ontario, Canada	FA-'20
69	Darius Harper	T	6-6	300	23	R	Cincinnati	Springfield, Ohio	FA-'21
70	Rashawn Slater	T	6-4	315	22	R	Northwestern	Sugar Land, Texas	D1-'21
71	Matt Feiler	G	6-6	330	29	5	Bloomsburg	Strasburg, Pa.	UFA (Pit)-'21
73	Tyree St. Louis	G/T	6-5	315	24	2	Miami	Tampa, Fla.	FA-'19
74	Storm Norton	T	6-7	317	27	2	Toledo	Toledo, Ohio	FA-'20
75	Bryan Bulaga	T	6-5	314	32	12	Iowa	Barrington, Ill.	UFA (GB)-'20
76	Oday Aboushi	G	6-5	315	30	9	Virginia	Brooklyn, N.Y.	UFA (Det)-'21
77	Frederick Smith Jr.	DL	6-3	300	24	1	Arkansas	Moultrie, Ga.	FA-'20
78	Willie Yarbary	DL	6-3	292	25	1	Wake Forest	Augusta, Ga.	FA-'21
79	Trey Pipkins III	T	6-6	307	24	3	Sioux Falls	Apple Valley, Minn.	D3-'19
80	John Hurst	WR	6-2	190	24	1	West Georgia	Milton, Ga.	FA-'20
81	Mike Williams	WR	6-4	218	26	5	Clemson	Santee, S.C.	D1-'17
82	Stephen Anderson	TE	6-3	230	28	4	California	San Jose, Calif.	FA-'19
83	Tyron Johnson	WR	6-1	193	25	2	Oklahoma State	New Orleans, La.	FA-'19
84	KJ Hill Jr.	WR	6-0	196	23	2	Ohio State	Little Rock, Ark.	D7-'20
86	Austin Proehl	WR	5-10	185	25	1	North Carolina	Charlotte, N.C.	W (SF)-'21
87	Jared Cook	TE	6-5	254	34	13	South Carolina	Suwanee, Ga.	UFA (NO)-'21
88	Tre' McKitty	TE	6-4	246	22	R	Georgia	Wesley Chapel, Fla.	D3b-'21
89	Donald Parham Jr.	TE	6-8	237	23	2	Stetson	Lakeland, Fla.	FA-'20
90	Chris Okoye	DL	6-5	325	25	1	Ferris State	Novi, Mich.	FA-'21
91	Cortez Broughton	DL	6-2	293	24	3	Cincinnati	Warner Robins, Ga.	D7-'19
92	Joe Gaziano	OLB	6-4	280	24	1	Northwestern	Scituate, Mass.	FA-'20
93	Justin Jones	DL	6-3	309	24	4	North Carolina State	Austell, Ga.	D3-'18
94	Chris Rumph II	OLB	6-2	244	22	R	Duke	Gainesville, Fla.	D4-'21
95	Christian Covington	DL	6-2	300	27	7	Rice	Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada	FA-'21
96	Breiden Fehoko	DL	6-3	300	24	1	Louisiana State	Honolulu, Hawaii	FA-'20
97	Joey Bosa	OLB	6-5	280	26	6	Ohio State	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	D1-'16
98	Linval Joseph	DL	6-4	329	32	12	East Carolina	Christiansted, U.S. Virgin Islands	FA-'20
99	Jerry Tillery	DL	6-6	295	24	3	Notre Dame	Shreveport, La.	D1-'19

2021 LOS ANGELES CHARGERS ALPHA ROSTER

ACTIVE ROSTER

No.	Name	Pos.	Ht.	Wt.	DOB	Exp.	College	Hometown	How Acq.
76	Aboushi, Oday	G	6-5	315	6/5/91	9	Virginia	Brooklyn, N.Y.	UFA (Det)-'21
24	Adderley, Nasir	S	6-0	206	5/31/97	3	Delaware	Philadelphia, Pa.	D2-'19
13	Allen, Keenan	WR	6-2	211	4/27/92	9	California	Greensboro, N.C.	D3-'13
82	Anderson, Stephen	TE	6-3	230	1/30/93	4	California	San Jose, Calif.	FA-'19
4	Badgley, Michael	K	5-10	183	7/28/95	4	Miami	Summit, N.J.	FA-'18
36	Bandy, Michael	WR	5-10	190	12/5/97	1	San Diego	La Mirada, Calif.	FA-'21
97	Bosa, Joey	OLB	6-5	280	7/11/95	6	Ohio State	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	D1-'16
34	Bradwell, Darius	RB	6-0	235	5/15/97	1	Tulane	Tallahassee, Fla.	FA-'20
38	Brannon, John	CB	6-0	190	3/10/98	1	Western Carolina	Charlotte, N.C.	FA-'20
91	Broughton, Cortez	DL	6-2	293	9/2/96	3	Cincinnati	Warner Robins, Ga.	D7-'19
75	Bulaga, Bryan	T	6-5	314	3/21/89	12	Iowa	Barrington, Ill.	UFA (GB)-'20
20	Campbell, Tevaughn	CB	6-0	200	6/14/93	2	Regina	Toronto, Ontario, Canada	FA-'19
50	Christiansen, Cole	LB	6-1	230	7/30/97	1	Army	Suffolk, Va.	FA-'20
87	Cook, Jared	TE	6-5	254	4/7/87	13	South Carolina	Suwanee, Ga.	UFA (NO)-'21
3	Costello, KJ	QB	6-5	225	9/22/99	R	Mississippi State	Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif.	FA-'21
95	Covington, Christian	DL	6-2	300	10/16/93	7	Rice	Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada	FA-'21
7	Daniel, Chase	QB	6-0	229	10/7/86	12	Missouri	Southlake, Texas	FA-'21
43	Davis, Michael	CB	6-2	196	1/6/95	5	Brigham Young	Glendale, Calif.	FA-'17
46	DeLuca, Ben	DB	6-1	202	4/9/98	R	Charlotte	Orlando, Fla.	FA-'21
8t	Edwards, Lachlan	P	6-4	209	4/27/92	5	Sam Houston State	Hastings, Victoria, Australia	FA-'20
51	Egbule, Emeke	OLB	6-2	245	10/13/96	3	Houston	Houston, Texas	D6-'19
30	Ekeler, Austin	RB	5-10	200	5/17/95	5	Western State Colorado	Eaton, Colo.	FA-'17
52	Fackrell, Kyler	OLB	6-5	245	11/25/95	6	Utah State	Mesa, Ariz.	UFA (NYG)-'21
28	Facyson, Brandon	CB	6-2	197	9/8/94	4	Virginia Tech	Newnan, Ga.	FA-'18
96	Fehoko, Breiden	DL	6-3	300	10/15/96	1	Louisiana State	Honolulu, Hawaii	FA-'20
71	Feiler, Matt	G	6-6	330	7/7/92	5	Bloomsburg	Strasburg, Pa.	UFA (Pit)-'21
92	Gaziano, Joe	OLB	6-4	280	9/27/96	1	Northwestern	Scituate, Mass.	FA-'20
65	Gilliam, Nate	G	6-4	310	7/6/97	1	Wake Forest	Knoxville, Tenn.	FA-'20
32	Gilman, Alohi	S	5-10	201	9/17/97	2	Notre Dame	Laie, Hawaii	D6-'20
15	Guyton, Jalen	WR	6-1	212	6/7/97	2	North Texas	Allen, Texas	FA-'19
37	Hall, Kemon	CB	5-11	190	6/2/97	1	North Texas	Calhoun City, Miss.	W (Dal)-'21
69	Harper, Darius	T	6-6	300	10/10/97	R	Cincinnati	Springfield, Ohio	FA-'21
25	Harris Jr., Chris	CB	5-10	199	6/18/89	11	Kansas	Bixby, Okla.	UFA (Den)-'20
10	Herbert, Justin	QB	6-6	236	3/10/98	2	Oregon	Eugene, Ore.	D1a-'20
84	Hill Jr., KJ	WR	6-0	196	9/15/97	2	Ohio State	Little Rock, Ark.	D7-'20
67	Hunter, Ryan	G	6-3	316	4/1/95	1	Bowling Green	North Bay, Ontario, Canada	FA-'20
80	Hurst, John	WR	6-2	190	11/2/96	1	West Georgia	Milton, Ga.	FA-'20
22	Jackson, Justin	RB	6-0	200	4/22/96	4	Northwestern	Carol Stream, Ill.	D7-'18
64	Jaimes, Brenden	G/T	6-5	300	5/28/98	R	Nebraska	Austin, Texas	D5-'21
33	James Jr., Derwin	S	6-2	215	8/3/96	4	Florida State	Haines City, Fla.	D1-'18
83	Johnson, Tyron	WR	6-1	193	1/8/96	2	Oklahoma State	New Orleans, La.	FA-'19
93	Jones, Justin	DL	6-3	309	8/28/96	4	North Carolina State	Austell, Ga.	D3-'18
98	Joseph, Linval	DL	6-4	329	10/10/88	12	East Carolina	Christiansted, U.S. Virgin Islands	FA-'20
47	Kampmoyer, Hunter	TE	6-4	243	2/6/98	R	Oregon	Bishop, Calif.	FA-'21
27	Kelley, Joshua	RB	5-11	212	11/20/97	2	UCLA	Lancaster, Calif.	D4-'20
6	Kessman, Alex	K	6-2	189	1/2/98	R	Pittsburgh	Clarkston, Mich.	FA-'21
59	Langan, Ryan	LS	6-1	237	2/22/99	R	Georgia Southern	Cedar Rapids, Neb.	FA-'21
58	Lemonier, Jessie	OLB	6-2	240	1/31/97	2	Liberty	Miami, Fla.	FA-'20
63	Linsley, Corey	C	6-3	301	7/27/91	8	Ohio State	Boardman, Ohio	UFA (GB)-'21
53	Lloyd, Damon	LB	6-0	235	5/8/98	1	Indiana (Pa.)	Avingdon, Md.	FA-'21
1	Long, Ty	P	6-2	205	4/6/93	3	Alabama-Birmingham	Roswell, Ga.	FA-'19
45	Mazza, Cole	LS	6-1	247	2/14/95	3	Alabama	Bakersfield, Calif.	FA-'19
88	McKitty, Tre'	TE	6-4	246	1/12/99	R	Georgia	Wesley Chapel, Fla.	D3b-'21
66	Merrill, Forrest	DL	6-0	322	8/15/96	R	Arkansas State	Willard, Mo.	FA-'21
11	Moore Jr., Jason	WR	6-3	215	6/23/95	2	Findlay	Oberlin, Ohio	FA-'19
9	Murray Jr., Kenneth	LB	6-2	241	11/16/98	2	Oklahoma	Houston, Texas	D1b-'20
40	Nabers, Gabe	FB	6-3	235	11/5/97	2	Florida State	Hahira, Ga.	FA-'20
31	Niemann, Nick	LB	6-3	244	12/2/97	R	Iowa	Sycamore, Ill.	D6a-'21
74	Norton, Storm	T	6-7	317	5/16/94	2	Toledo	Toledo, Ohio	FA-'20
42	Nwosu, Uchenna	OLB	6-2	251	12/28/96	4	Southern California	Carson, Calif.	D2-'18
57	Ogbongbemiga, Amen	LB	6-0	231	9/4/98	R	Oklahoma State	Calgary, Alberta, Canada	FA-'21
90	Okoye, Chris	DL	6-5	325	6/22/96	1	Ferris State	Novi, Mich.	FA-'21
5	Palmer, Joshua	WR	6-1	210	9/22/99	R	Tennessee	Brampton, Ontario, Canada	D3a-'21
89	Parham Jr., Donald	TE	6-8	237	8/16/97	2	Stetson	Lakeland, Fla.	FA-'20
79	Pipkins III, Trey	T	6-6	307	9/5/96	3	Sioux Falls	Apple Valley, Minn.	D3-'19
86	Proehl, Austin	WR	5-10	185	10/11/95	1	North Carolina	Charlotte, N.C.	W (SF)-'21
61	Quessenberry, Scott	C/G	6-3	310	3/23/95	4	UCLA	La Costa, Calif.	D5-'18
12	Reed, Joe	WR	6-0	224	1/4/98	2	Virginia	Charlotte Court House, Va.	D5-'20
35	Rountree III, Larry	RB	5-10	211	2/13/99	R	Missouri	Raleigh, N.C.	D6b-'21
94	Rumph II, Chris	OLB	6-2	244	10/19/98	R	Duke	Gainesville, Fla.	D4-'21
8d	Sails, KJ	CB	5-11	180	5/2/97	R	South Florida	Tampa, Fla.	FA-'21
26	Samuel Jr., Asante	CB	5-10	180	10/3/99	R	Florida State	Fort Lauderdale, Fla.	D2-'21
41	Seybert, Matt	TE	6-4	257	5/2/97	1	Michigan State	Traverse City, Mich.	FA-'21
70	Slater, Rashawn	T	6-4	315	3/26/99	R	Northwestern	Sugar Land, Texas	D1-'21
77	Smith Jr., Frederick	DL	6-3	300	4/19/97	1	Arkansas	Moultrie, Ga.	FA-'20
23	Smith, Ryan	CB	5-11	189	9/7/93	6	North Carolina Central	Upper Marlboro, Md.	UFA (TB)-'21
48	Sokol, Matt	TE	6-5	249	11/9/95	1	Michigan State	Rochester, Mich.	FA-'20
60	Spalding, Kyle	T	6-6	299	8/8/98	R	San Diego State	McKinleyville, Calif.	FA-'21
73	St. Louis, Tyree	G/T	6-5	315	8/5/97	2	Miami	Tampa, Fla.	FA-'19
2	Stick, Easton	QB	6-1	224	9/15/95	3	North Dakota State	Omaha, Neb.	D5-'19
99	Tillery, Jerry	DL	6-6	295	10/8/96	3	Notre Dame	Shreveport, La.	D1-'19
49	Tranquill, Drue	LB	6-2	234	8/15/95	3	Notre Dame	Fort Wayne, Ind.	D4-'19
39	Vaughn, Donte	CB	6-2	210	10/12/97	1	Notre Dame	Memphis, Tenn.	FA-'20
16	Vizcaino, Tristan	K	6-2	205	7/31/96	1	Washington	Chino Hills, Calif.	FA-'21
29	Webb Jr., Mark	DB	6-1	207	9/10/98	R	Georgia	Philadelphia, Pa.	D7-'21
44	White, Kyzir	LB	6-2	216	3/24/96	4	West Virginia	Macungie, Pa.	D4-'18
81	Williams, Mike	WR	6-4	218	10/4/94	5	Clemson	Santee, S.C.	D1-'17
78	Yarbary, Willie	DL	6-3	292	6/18/96	1	Wake Forest	Augusta, Ga.	FA-'21

2021 LOS ANGELES CHARGERS DEPTH CHART

Depth Chart is unofficial and compiled by Chargers Communications

OFFENSE

WR	13	Keenan Allen	15	Jalen Guyton	84	KJ Hill Jr.
			5	Joshua Palmer	86	Austin Proehl
					[80	John Hurst]
LT	70	Rashawn Slater	79	Trey Pipkins III	69	Darius Harper
LG	71	Matt Feiler	67	Ryan Hunter	60	Kyle Spalding
C	63	Corey Linsley	61	Scott Quessenberry	65	Nate Gilliam
RG	76	Oday Aboushi	73	Tyree St. Louis	64	Brenden Jaimes
RT	75	Bryan Bulaga	74	Storm Norton		
TE	87	Jared Cook	89	Donald Parham Jr.	82	Stephen Anderson
			88	Tre' McKitty	48	Matt Sokol
			47	Hunter Kampmoyer	41	Matt Seybert
WR	81	Mike Williams	83	Tyron Johnson	11	Jason Moore Jr.
			12	Joe Reed	36	Michael Bandy
QB	10	Justin Herbert	7	Chase Daniel	2	Easton Stick
					3	KJ Costello
FB	40	Gabe Nabers				
RB	30	Austin Ekeler	22	Justin Jackson	27	Joshua Kelley
			35	Larry Rountree III	34	Darius Bradwell

DEFENSE

EDGE	97	Joey Bosa	52	Kyler Fackrell	58	Jessie Lemonier
DL	99	Jerry Tillery	96	Breiden Fehoko	92	Joe Gaziano
			78	Willie Yarbary	90	Chris Okoye
DL	98	Linval Joseph	95	Christian Covington	77	Frederick Smith Jr.
DL	93	Justin Jones	91	Cortez Broughton	66	Forrest Merrill
EDGE	42	Uchenna Nwosu	51	Emeke Egbule — OR —	94	Chris Rumph II
LB	9	Kenneth Murray Jr.	31	Nick Niemann	57	Amen Ogbongbemiga
LB	49	Drue Tranquill — OR —	44	Kyzir White	50	Cole Christiansen
					53	Damon Lloyd
CB	43	Michael Davis	28	Brandon Facyson	20	Tevaughn Campbell
			37	Kemon Hall	38	John Brannon
S	24	Nasir Adderley	29	Mark Webb Jr.		
S	33	Derwin James Jr.	32	Alohi Gilman	46	Ben DeLuca
CB	25	Chris Harris Jr.	26	Asante Samuel Jr.	23	Ryan Smith
			39	Donte Vaughn	8	KJ Sails

SPECIALISTS

K	4	Michael Badgley	16	Tristan Vizcaino	6	Alex Kessman
P	1	Ty Long	8	Lachlan Edwards		
KO	1	Ty Long	16	Tristan Vizcaino	6	Alex Kessman
H	1	Ty Long	8	Lachlan Edwards		
LS	45	Cole Mazza	59	Ryan Langan		
KR	24	Nasir Adderley	84	KJ Hill Jr.	86	Austin Proehl
PR	84	KJ Hill Jr.	86	Austin Proehl	15	Jalen Guyton

NOTE: Rookies are underlined; Players on Active/Physically Unable to Perform are in brackets

2021 TRANSACTIONS BY DATE

Jan. 4 Signed RB Darius Bradwell, CB John Brannon, P Lachlan Edwards, DL Breiden Fehoko, G Nate Gilliam, G Ryan Hunter, WR John Hurst, WR Jason Moore Jr., DL Frederick Smith Jr., and CB Donte Vaughn to Reserve/Future contracts.

Jan. 7 Activated WR Keenan Allen and TE Hunter Henry from Reserve/COVID-19. Activated S Derwin James Jr., from Reserve/COVID-19 and remains on Reserve/Injured.

Feb. 26 Re-signed CB Tevaughn Campbell.

March 5 Signed K Tristan Vizcaino.

March 12 Released G Trai Turner. Waived LB Malik Jefferson.

March 17 Re-signed K Michael Badgley, CB Michael Davis and P Ty Long.

March 18 Re-signed G/T Tyree St. Louis.

March 19 Signed G Matt Feiler and C Corey Linsley. Re-signed CB Brandon Facyson.

March 22 Re-signed TE Stephen Anderson.

March 23 Signed G Oday Aboushi and TE Jared Cook.

March 26 Signed OLB Kyler Fackrell.

March 31 Signed QB Chase Daniel and CB Ryan Smith.

May 5 Claimed CB Kemon Hall off Waivers.

May 11 Signed DL Christian Covington.

May 14 Signed DB Ben DeLuca, DL Jared Goldwire, T Darius Harper, G/T Brenden Jaimes, TE Hunter Kampmoyer, K Alex Kessman, LS Ryan Langen, DL Forrest Merrill, LB Nick Niemann, LB Amen Ogbongbemiga, RB Larry Rountree III, CB Asante Samuel Jr., T Kyle Spalding, DB Mark Webb Jr.

May 18 Signed OLB Chris Rumph II. Claimed WR Austin Proehl off Waivers.

June 21 Signed WR Michael Bandy, LB Damon Lloyd, TE Matt Seybert and DL Willie Yarbary.

July 23 Signed WR Joshua Palmer.

July 27 Signed TE Tre' McKitty and T Rashawn Slater. Placed RB Justin Jackson on Reserve/COVID-19. Declared WR John Hurst Physically Unable to Perform.

July 29 Activated RB Justin Jackson from Reserve/COVID-19.

Aug. 1 Signed QB KJ Costello.

Aug. 5 Placed DL Jared Goldwire on Reserve/Retired.

Aug. 7 Signed DL Chris Okoye and CB KJ Sails.

2021 LOS ANGELES CHARGERS COACHES

Head Coach: Brandon Staley

Defensive Coordinator: Renaldo Hill
Offensive Coordinator: Joe Lombardi
Special Teams Coordinator: Derius Swinton II

Secondary: Derrick Ansley
Wide Receivers: Chris Beatty
Assistant Special Teams: Mayur Chaudhari
Passing Game Coordinator/ Quarterbacks: Shane Day
Assistant Secondary: Tom Donatell
Running Backs: Derrick Foster
Tight Ends: Kevin Koger
Run Game Coordinator/ Outside Linebackers: Jay Rodgers

Assistant Offensive Line: Shaun Sarrett
Offensive Assistant: Dan Shamash
Defensive Quality Control: Isaac Shewmaker
Run Game Coordinator/ Offensive Line: Frank Smith
Defensive Line: Giff Smith
Alex G. Spanos Coaching Fellow: John Timu
Offensive Quality Control: Chandler Whitmer
Linebackers: Michael Wilhoite
Special Assistant to the Head Coach: Cody Cejda
Director of Sports Performance: Anthony Lomando
Head Strength & Conditioning: Jonathan Brooks
Assistant Strength & Conditioning: Lucius Jordan

PRONUNCIATION

Oday **Aboushi** . . . . . uh-BOO-shee
Nasir Adderley . . . . . nah-SEER ADD-er-lee
Michael **Badgley** . . . . . BADGE-lee
Cortez **Broughton** . . . . . BROUGHT-un
Bryan **Bulaga** . . . . . buh-LAH-guh
Tevaughn Campbell . . . . . tuh-VAUGHN
Lachlan Edwards . . . . . LOCK-lan
Emeke Egbule . . eh-MEH-keh egg-BOO-leh
Austin **Ekeler** . . . . . ECK-ler
Brandon **Facyson** . . . . . FAY-sen
Breiden Fehoko . . . . . BRAY-dun fuh-HO-ko
Matt **Feiler** . . . . . FEYE-luhr
Nate **Gilliam** . . . . . GILL-em
Alohi Gilman . . . . . uh-LOW-hee
Kemon Hall . . . . . KEY-mahn
Brenden **Jaimes** . . . . . HIGH-miss
Tyron Johnson . . . . . TY-run
Jessie **Lemonier** . . . . . lemon-YAY
Cole **Mazza** . . . . . MAHZ-uh
Nick **Niemann** . . . . . KNEE-min
Uchenna Nwosu . . oo-CHEN-uh noo-WOE-sue
Amen Ogbongbemiga . . . . . EH-men awg-BONG-buh-mee-guh
Chris **Okoye** . . . . . uh-KOY-yay
Donald **Parham** Jr. . . . . par-HAM
Austin **Proehl** . . . . . PROLL
Scott **Quessenberry** . . . QWES-sin-bear-ee
Matt **Seyebert** . . . . . SEYE-bert
Rashawn Slater . . . . . ruh-SHAWN
Matt **Sokol** . . . . . SO-kull
Tyree **St. Louis** . . . . . SAINT LOO-iss
Tristan **Vizcaino** . . . . . viz-keye-EE-no
Kyzir White . . . . . kie-ZEER
Willie **Yarbary** . . . . . YAR-burry

SUPPLEMENTAL BIOS



KJ COSTELLO ⚡ 3

QUARTERBACK | MISSISSIPPI STATE
6-5 | 225 lbs | RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA, CALIF.
FREE AGENT — 2021
EXPERIENCE: ROOKIE

COLLEGE: Played the 2020 season at Mississippi State after spending his first three collegiate seasons at Stanford (2017-19)... In his first start for the Bulldogs, defeated the defending national champion LSU Tigers behind an output of 623 passing yards, an effort which broke the Southeastern Conference's single-game record...Earned second-team All-Pacific-12 recognition following the 2018 season, where he posted a conference-best 155.0 efficiency rating by throwing 29 TDs and 3,540 yards, completing 65.1 percent of his passes (269-of-413)...For his career, completed 629-of-1,000 pass attempts (62.9 pct.) for 7,434 yards and 55 TDs with 29 INTs (137.7 efficiency rating)... Added 349 rushing yards and three scores on the ground...Twice was a team captain while playing in Palo Alto, Calif.

PERSONAL: Given name Kevin Richard Costello...Born in Newport Beach, Calif. ...Prior to graduate transferring to Mississippi State, earned a bachelor's degree in political science from Stanford... Enjoys golfing and playing ping pong...**High School:** Attended Santa Margarita Catholic High in Rancho Santa Margarita, Calif., where he threw for a school-record 8,222 career passing yards, surpassing former NFL signal-caller Carson Palmer...Held 19 school records at the end of his prep career, including career passing scores (62) and passing yards in a single game (452)... Tabbed as the No. 2 overall recruit (2016) in the state of California by ESPN...Selected to play in the U.S. Army All-America Game... Earned All-State honors following both the 2014 and 2015 seasons...Received Presidential Honor Roll recognition.

CAREER NFL TRANSACTIONS:
2021: Signed by Los Angeles Chargers as undrafted free agent, Aug. 1.



CHRIS OKOYE ⚡ 90

DEFENSIVE LINE | FERRIS STATE
6-5 | 325 lbs | NOVI, MICH.
FREE AGENT — 2021
EXPERIENCE: 1ST NFL SEASON
1ST YEAR WITH CHARGERS

THE SPRING LEAGUE (2021): Played for the Alphas, helping The Spring League squad to a 3-2 record.

2018: Spent the offseason with the Cincinnati Bengals, appearing in three preseason games before being waived during final roster reductions...Totaled a solo defensive tackle and three QB hits in the exhibition slate.

COLLEGE: Played four seasons (2014-17) at Ferris State, appearing in 42 career games for the Bulldogs...Totaled 67 tackles over his four years, helping the team appear in the NCAA Division II playoffs as a junior and senior...Posted the first sack of his career in 2015.

PERSONAL: Given name Chris Okoye...Native of Novi, Mich. ...**High School:** Attended Detroit Central Catholic in Novi, Mich. ...In April 2020, was inducted into the Catholic High School League (Mich.) Hall of Fame, which serves the largest Catholic prep sports league in the United States, featuring 27 private high schools throughout southeast Michigan...Helped lead the Shamrocks to three state championship game appearances during his prep career...As a senior, propelled Detroit Central Catholic to an 11-win season and the program's fifth-straight district title, earning all-conference and all-area recognition.

CAREER NFL TRANSACTIONS:
2018: Signed by Cincinnati Bengals as undrafted free agent, May 14...Waived by Bengals, Sept. 6.
2021: Signed by Los Angeles Chargers as free agent, Aug. 7.



KJ SAILS ⚡ 8

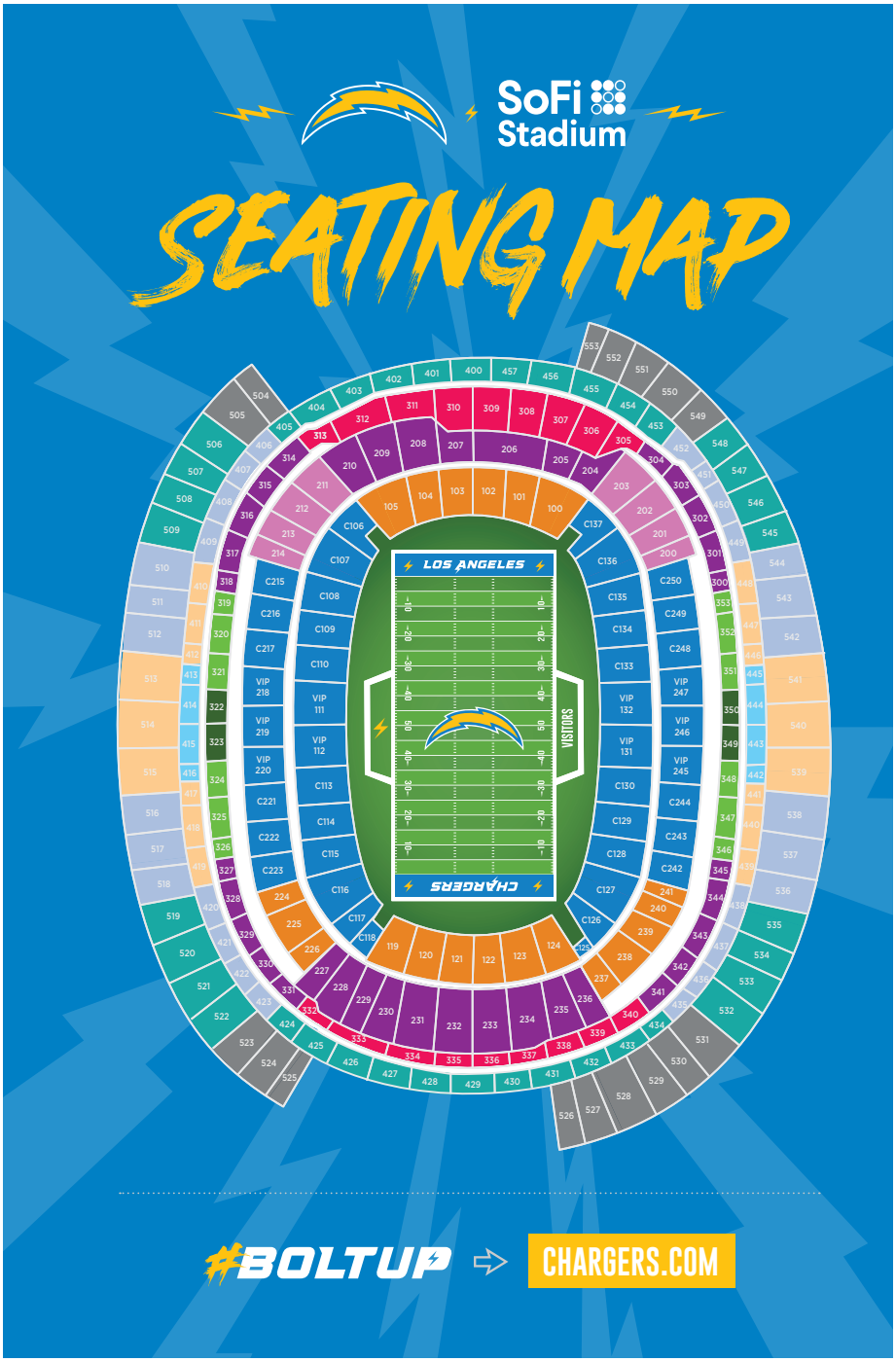
CORNERBACK | SOUTH FLORIDA
5-11 | 180 lbs | TAMPA, FLA.
FREE AGENT — 2021
EXPERIENCE: ROOKIE

COLLEGE: Played two seasons (2019-20) at South Florida after playing at North Carolina for parts of three years (2016-18)...Over the course of his collegiate career, appeared in 39 games, posting 104 tackles (80 solo) and three INTs...Added a forced fumble, two recoveries and 23 passes defensed...Served on special teams at South Florida, returning 19 punts for 188 yards (9.9 avg.)...Saw the most defensive action of his career in 2019, where he started all 12 games for the Bulls and picked off all three career passes while also posting 42 tackles (34 solo)...Set a career-best 13 pass breakups in 2017 with North Carolina.

PERSONAL: Given name Kevin J. Sails...Earned his bachelor's degree from South Florida in interdisciplinary social sciences...A steward of his native Tampa, Fla., community, he organized a unity walk in June 2020 where over 400 USF players, coaches, administrators and staff members joined forces with members of the community to raise awareness for social injustices...The walk, which was conducted in silence, traversed from downtown Tampa to Central Avenue Village, a segment of the city that features prominent historical markers recognizing past and present African-American leaders in the community...Plays the drums at his local church...On Feb. 18, 2021, served as the honorary Mayor of Tampa for the day, where he spent the day shadowing elected Mayor Jane Castor and learning the ins-and-outs of heading operations for a municipality with over 350,000 residents...**High School:** Attended East Bay High School in Tampa, Fla. ...Participated in the Offense-Defense All-American Bowl in Daytona Beach, Fla. ...As a senior in 2015, recorded two interceptions and two forced fumbles defensively, while leading East Bay in receiving with 21 catches for 344 yards and three scores...Added five blocked kicks in 2015 alone.

CAREER NFL TRANSACTIONS:
2021: Signed by Los Angeles Chargers as undrafted free agent, Aug. 7.

MEDIA INFORMATION



GAME-DAY MEDIA PARKING: Media attending Chargers home games have been assigned reserved areas to park at SoFi Stadium. Media will park in Lot E of SoFi Stadium. All parking will be distributed electronically. As a reminder, parking is limited and is being provided as a courtesy.

MEDIA ENTRANCE: All credentialed media must enter through southeast media gate between entries 10 & 11 near Media Will Call and are subject to search procedures. Please be prepared to open all cases and bags for inspection by SoFi Stadium security personnel. All items will be inspected and tagged for security purposes. Please make sure bags are identifiable and limit carry-in items to only what is necessary. Please remove any security tags from prior games.

PRESS WILL CALL
Press Will Call is located at the southeast media gate between entries 10 & 11.

PRESS BOX
Media can access the press box by entering SoFi Stadium through the southeast media gate. Once on the concourse, turn left and walk along the concourse around the South end zone until reaching elevators in the southwest corner of the stadium. Take the elevators up to level 7 to access the press box.

CHARGERS MEDIA SITE
Chargers.com/media is available to assist media with coverage leading up to each game of the 2021 season. The media site contains digital copies of all press materials. Credential requests on the site must be submitted by the sports director, sports editor or photo editor to be considered.

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LOS ANGELES CHARGERS

Justin Herbert, Chargers ready to be West Coast's next Cinderella squad

By Adam Schein
NFL.com
April 1, 2021

The streak is over.

This is the spot in my annual column announcing my choice for the upcoming season's Cinderella team where I normally recount my string of past successes. The 2017 Jaguars reached the AFC title game. The 2018 Bears captured their first division title in eight years. The 2019 Bills won double-digit games for the first time since 1999.

And the 2020 Cardinals ... well, the 2020 Cardinals lost to two backup quarterbacks in the final two weeks of the season, falling out of the playoff race and finishing 8-8. For the first time in four years, my Cinderella team missed the postseason.

I'm still annoyed, even if this isn't technically supposed to be a playoff pick. Nevertheless, I remain undaunted in my search for a sleeper who can capture the hearts and minds of a nation. And unlike last year, when the COVID-19 pandemic shut down the sports world, I can seek inspiration from what has arguably been the best NCAA men's basketball tournament ever.

Thinking about the way Pac-12 teams have repeatedly shocked the experts, with 11th-seeded UCLA's stunning win over top-seeded Michigan in the Elite Eight capping a record-setting run of upsets by the Bruins, 12th-seeded Oregon State, seventh-seeded Oregon and sixth-seeded USC, I found myself channeling the words of the great Coolio:

Ain't no party like a West Coast party, 'cause a West Coast party don't stop!

He's right. And the party baton is about to be carried into the NFL season by my 2021 Cinderella team: the Los Angeles Chargers.

The key in this exercise is identifying a team that did not make the playoffs last season and that is not on the radar of most people (which rules out teams like the Cowboys, who should be favorites in the NFC East with Dak Prescott returning). I know the Chargers seem to attract offseason buzz like it's their business, but they also have regularly failed to make good on it -- meaning they are, in a way, an ideal post-hype-ish choice.

Plus, like Cinderella's slipper, the Bolts just feel right.

It starts with the quarterback. Regular readers (and listeners and viewers) know I've been obsessed with Justin Herbert since long before Los Angeles' brilliant decision to draft him sixth overall last year. I was enamored with Herbert's arm, athleticism, accuracy, smarts, leadership and poise, and how it could translate into instant NFL stardom. It all came to fruition in a debut season for the ages, with the former Oregon Duck throwing for 4,336 yards and 31 TDs (against just 10 picks) before capturing the Offensive Rookie of the Year award.

He developed a tremendous rapport with underrated star receiver Keenan Allen while showing he's the kind of special player who elevates everyone around him. The kid has it.

And that's just what we saw last year, when he started off as a backup who had to adjust to the NFL during a COVID-limited offseason. Think of what Herbert will be able to do in 2021, entering as an entrenched starter.

Think of what he'll be able to do with a new coach.

I love ex-Chargers coach Anthony Lynn, who earned my vote for Coach of the Year in 2018, when he helped the team to a 12-4 record and playoff berth. He's a great person. But the team was dropping too many close games, racking up more defeats by seven points or less (15) in the past two seasons than any other NFL team in that span, and Lynn's game-management was a significant problem. Losing was becoming too normal. A change was needed.

Brandon Staley is the right guy at the right time. While there is always an unknown surrounding first-year coaches, Staley represents a calculated upgrade. The well-respected defensive whiz, whose players seemed to loved playing for him in previous stops with the Rams, Broncos and Bears, will end the run of "you can't make 'em up" losses that has been dogging the Chargers.

Yes, what really gets me excited about this team is thinking about all the additions that were made to help Herbert, from Staley to Corey Linsley, who will be worth every single penny of his five-year, $62.5 million deal as the new leader of the offensive line. I raved about the fit and contract in this space last week -- he's the best center in football. Tight end Jared Cook, filling in for the departed Hunter Henry on a one-year deal, is a great replacement who will be able to groove with the QB.

And I cannot wait to see what general manager Tom Telesco does with the 13th pick in the 2021 NFL Draft.

Telesco is a huge part of this. He's a brilliant talent evaluator, and he's loaded the roster with promising players who haven't even reached their peak yet. Think of their overlooked depth and ability at running back (2020 fourth-rounder Joshua Kelley) and receiver (former undrafted players Jalen Guyton and Tyron Johnson).

One year ago, a few months after Telesco picked linebacker Kenneth Murray with a second first-rounder, I made the case that the Chargers' defense was the best in the NFL. While Murray was terrific as a tackling machine, logging 107 total tackles (second-most among rookies last season), I had to back off that bold claim when safety Derwin James was lost for the 2020 season. James will be back, and he will thrive in Staley's dynamic and diverse scheme. Joey Bosa is a flat-out monster at defensive end, one of the best defensive players in the sport. He's a nightmare for opposing quarterbacks -- and I think Staley can make him even better. That's scary.

Obviously, it will be tough to win the AFC West, where Patrick Mahomes and the Chiefs loom. But I love this Chargers group, which is just silly with upside. The right people are in place -- and they will get me back on track after the Cardinals let me down last year.

The slipper will go back on that foot. And somewhere, Coolio will be smiling. Because this West Coast party is going to roll long past midnight.

State of the 2021 Los Angeles Chargers: Can Brandon Staley lift talented roster into NFL playoffs?

By Adam Rank
NFL.com
July 14, 2021

Members of the Chargers organization, Chargers fans around the world and those who are still waiting on for a remake on this classic song: **Super Chargers song**

Today is a great day to be a fan of the Los Angeles Chargers. I know, you might have heard this before and these words reach you with some skepticism.

But the Chargers are truly in a great spot. A young innovative coach and staff. One of the best young quarterbacks in the game. And a defense that can even put a scare into Patrick Mahomes.

The Chargers could make some noise this season.

How the Chargers got here

Let's take a quick look back at the highs and lows of the 2020 season.

The highs:

• Finding the franchise QB. I know it had been a long drought going from Philip Rivers to Justin Herbert. I mean it as all of *checks notes* one game. And I know it was weird the way Justin got his first start. But who cares. You have a franchise quarterback again. You went from Drew Brees to Philip Rivers to Justin Herbert. As a fan of a franchise that has struggled to find a quarterback (I support the Bears), I was jealous.

• Blue streak. It's the annual rite of fall. Out of playoff contention, the Chargers go on a massive winning streak to pad their record and make things not look so bad. This time, the Chargers closed out with four straight wins.

The lows:

• Bittersweet opener. The Chargers opened the season with a win at Cincinnati, which was huge. And then Herbert made his surprise start in Week 2. But the Chargers lost a heartbreaker in overtime. They had taken 20-17 lead with 2:27 remaining, but the Chiefs drove down the field to force overtime and eventually won the game.

• Skidding. The Chargers had a four-game skid to limp into the bye week at 1-4. After a win over Jacksonville, they dropped three more consecutive games to basically remove themselves from playoff contention. But at least you didn't lose to the Jets like the Rams did.

2021 VIPs

Head coach: Brandon Staley. The NFL went an entire year without hiring a Sean McVay assistant, so thankfully the league course corrected with the hiring of Staley. It's like when Disney didn't churn out the same kids movie over and over, but hey, they've made one and this time they are sea monsters. I'm kidding. Luca was great. But I do really like the hiring of Staley, the Rams defensive coordinator from a season ago.

You know, McVay made a bold move to remove Wade Phillips and go with Staley. But it was perfect. The Rams led the NFL in scoring defense (18.5), total defense (281.9) and pass defense (190.7) in his first year as defensive coordinator. Staley was also part of some good defenses in Denver and Chicago, learning under Vic Fangio. And he's coming to a Chargers team that's already pretty damn good defensively. You're building a team that will have a defensive identity -- one that could be the best in the league. And you combine that with a franchise quarterback who looked like the real deal last year. In fact, let's just get into that for a moment.

Quarterback: Justin Herbert. I was apprehensive about Herbert last year because I was worried about his performances in some big games at Oregon. And well, I'm an idiot because Justin had one of the best rookie seasons a quarterback has ever had. He set an NFL record with 31 touchdown passes. His 4,336 passing yards were the second-most by a rookie right behind Andrew Luck. But remember, Justin did not play in the team's first game of the season.

And I know a lot of people -- *cough* Vikings fans *cough* -- were a little miffed that Herbert won the 2020 Offensive Rooke of the Year award. But be serious. Justin Jefferson was amazing last year. But a record-breaking franchise quarterback is getting that hardware. And there is reason to believe Herbert can be even better this year.

Projected 2021 MVP: Joey Bosa, edge. One of the most-exciting things to look forward to this season is Staley working with Bosa who has been one of the best players in the game when healthy. Bosa led the Chargers with 7.5 sacks last year but missed four games with a concussion and shin injury. He has missed at least four games in three of his five seasons.

But when he's on the field, he's dominant. He had 12.5 sacks in 2017 and 11.5 sacks in 2019, his two full seasons in the NFL. And Staley's defense was first in the league last year. This could be a season when we see Bosa emerge as the best in the game. Kind of like when Leonardo DiCaprio went from being the guy from Growing Pains and Poison Ivy to the guy in The Basketball Diaries and Titanic.

2021 breakout star: Tyron Johnson, receiver. I feel like we do this every year with Chargers receivers. Keenan Allen is truly one of the best in the game, and perhaps, one of the most overlooked pass-catchers. But we're always looking for that Dick Grayson-like sidekick. While Mike Williams will be talked about a lot, I'm looking forward to seeing Johnson. A former practice squad receiver who quietly developed some chemistry with Herbert. He had 20 receptions for 398 yards and three touchdowns last year. And he was called out by Staley in this press conference.

No, in a good way. Remember, TJ was the club leader in air yards per target? Herbert threw 11 deep pass touchdowns (20+ air yards) last year, which was tied for third in the league, according to Next Gen Stats. That's on a Russell Wilson, Patrick Mahomes and Aaron Rodgers level.

New face to know: Corey Linsley, center. Daps (are we still saying that?) to Linsley for getting out of Green Bay. He doesn't need to worry about getting caught up in the Aaron Rodgers drama; instead, he traded in for a younger quarterback and is likely living the life in Newport Beach. Or at least that's where I would have chosen to go. Not too bad for him. Linsley is coming off an All-Pro season (his first) and will hopefully anchor a line that used the fifth-most combinations last year. And that will be important. Herbert led the NFL with 1,113 passing yards and nine touchdowns under pressure in 2020. He was sacked 32 times in 2020, which was tied for the ninth-most in the league. And the Chargers had the third-worst PFF pass-blocking grade (54.5) and worst run-blocking grade (46.5) in the NFL in 2020.

The 2021 roadmap

The competitive urgency index is: MEDIUM. You have a first-year coach, so you can't have these wild expectations for the Chargers. But at the same time, you have this pretty incredible roster, so maybe you can expect to win some games.

Three key dates:

• Week 3 at Kansas City Chiefs. The Chargers open with two winnable games at Washington and at home against the Cowboys. But they then go on the road to K.C., where they have had some success. And follow that with a home game against the Raiders.

• Week 11 vs. Pittsburgh Steelers. I'm interested to see how the Steelers play this season. I feel like both teams are in a spot where they aren't the best team in the division but will be competing for a playoff spot.

• Week 17 vs. Denver Broncos. Man, the last three games of the season should be against division rivals. I'll have to settle for a home date with the Broncos and closing the season in Vegas for the Chargers. This could be (and should be) for a playoff berth.

Will the Chargers be able to ...

Get the rookie version of Derwin James? My guy Dan Hanzus has James listed as his MVP for the Chargers this season, and I really like that pick. The Chargers stole him in the 2018 NFL Draft and he was pretty damn good. I mean, if you consider being an ALL-PRO pretty good. I don't know, you might have a different definition. The only thing is that injuries have derailed him over the last couple of seasons. He's played in just five games in the last two years. But the good news is, he was on the field for the team's most recent OTAs. And playing for Staley should give him the opportunity to put the last two years behind him and get back to that All-Pro level.

Be even better on offense? It's a weird thing to be talking about, I know. The Chargers were top 10 in total yards per game, passing yards per game and third-down percentage last season. But they did not have a player with 1,000 scrimmage yards in 2020.

I know, I would have thought Austin Ekeler had done it, too, despite him missing six games with a hamstring injury. He finished with 933 scrimmage yards, leading the team for the second consecutive year. Allen had 100 receptions but finished with 992 receiving yards to go with eight touchdowns. Going for 100 receptions but less than 1,000 receiving yards seems pretty tough to do. Allen ranks in the top six in the NFL in receptions and receiving yards since 2017. And, I don't know, maybe if the line can block for Herbert a little bit this season, then maybe they can put it all together for an even better year.

Proceed with Jared Cook? This is one of the things that would go along with the previous point. Hunter Henry signed with the New England Patriots during the offseason. The Chargers replaced him with Cook. And even though he's 34, I really do like this signing. He has familiarity with Joe Lombardi when he played in New Orleans. Cook's been productive over the last number of years. Lock him in for about 400 yards and five-ish touchdowns. And with some of the players I've already mentioned like Ekeler, Keenan and my guy Ty Johnson, he doesn't need to be a superstar. He can just be a small part of an ensemble cast. Like Ted on Scrubs. He wasn't the main character. But he was an underrated gem who stole most the scenes he was in. Cook just needs to pick his spots, and I would venture to say the Chargers don't miss Henry at all.

One storyline ...

… people are overlooking: How good Staley's defense was against the deep ball. The Chargers allowed a 111.2 passer rating on deep passes last season, which ranked 25th in the NFL. The Rams allowed a 29.2 passer rating on deep passes last year, which was first in the league. But then again, when Nick Foles is missing a wide open Darnell Mooney -- sorry not the time for that. I apologize. But man, if the Chargers can shore this up ... And they drafted Asante Samuel Jr. in the second round. This guy was a steal. Last year, PFF had him forcing 30 incompletions, tied for the second-most among cornerbacks in FBS since 2018. He also allowed a passer rating of 46.2 last season, which led the ACC.

… people are overlooking: Chase Daniel is the backup. Holy lord, I love Chase Daniel. He's made a career off being a backup quarterback. He's the Allen Covert of the NFL. And you probably don't know that name. But once you Google him, you're going to be like, "Oh yeah, that guy." And you're going to want to give me a fist bump the next time you see me.

… people are overthinking: Touchdown regression for Justin Herbert. The previous three quarterbacks to tie or break the rookie passing touchdown record did not increase their passing touchdown production the following season. Peyton Manning, Russell Wilson and Baker Mayfield all had fewer touchdowns. Only Dan Marino had more. My thing is, don't look at his passing touchdowns (I still took him in my dynasty draft). Because if the defense plays better, maybe Justin doesn't have to throw the ball 90 times a game. And the Chargers are playing with a lead. So don't judge Justin's second year on touchdowns alone.

… people are also overthinking: The coaching staff. I mentioned Lombardi, who is coming from New Orleans, which is great. Renaldo Hill is the defensive coordinator. And maybe it's just my thing. But I like when these young coaches have a veteran, former head coach on the staff like when McVay had Phillips. But then I look at Joe Judge and Jason Garrett and I've already talked me out of this. Do your thing, Staley, I believe in you.

For the 2021 season to be a success, the Chargers MUST …

Not lose games in horrific fashion. I mean, check out Twitter any time the Chargers lose. Because people -- who once said it as a joke -- now have legitimate empathy for the Chargers finding creative ways to lose. At least until the playoffs are out of reach and they go on a winning streak to close out the season.

In closing

Chargers seasons can be a lot like DC movies. They get all sorts of hype and buildup. You purchase your ticket. And you end up walking away disappointed. Well, maybe that was true years ago. DC has been on a roll lately, and I would even say it's outdoing Marvel in some spots. Likewise, I really do believe the Chargers are ready for big things again. It would be dangerous to just write them off as the "same old Chargers" because that's just not the case.

17-Game Regular Season Confirmed: Chargers to Host Vikings in 2021

By Hayley Elwood
Chargers.com
March 30, 2021

What was originally discussed a year ago is now official: the NFL regular season is expanding to 17 games beginning in 2021.

For the Bolts, they'll host the Minnesota Vikings as their additional game for the 2021 season.

In 2021, each division will play the interconference opponent from the 2019 season who finished in the same standing as them in 2020. The AFC West played the NFC North in 2019 and the Chargers and Vikings both finished third in their respective divisions last season.

Per the NFL: Under the scheduling formula below, every team plays three preseason games and 17 regular-season games with one bye week. Clubs will host 10 games overall – either nine regular-season games and one preseason game or eight regular-season games and two preseason games.

The expansion to one regular-season game per team was agreed upon last March as part of the new Collective Bargaining Agreement; however, it wasn't made official until this week, when the NFL club owners officially approved the move.

This marks the league's first expansion since 1978, when they made the switch to a 16-game regular-season.

Mark your calendars because NFL Kickoff Weekend will begin Thursday, Sept. 9. The 2022 Pro Bowl will be played on Sunday, Feb. 6 at Allegiant Stadium in Las Vegas and Super Bowl LVI at SoFi Stadium will occur Sunday, Feb. 13, 2022.

BRANDON STALEY

Brandon Staley gets Chargers to buy in with collaborative culture

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
July 27, 2021

Brandon Staley was introduced as the Chargers' head coach, but he looked the part of a motivational speaker by comfortably engaging with about 100 high school athletes during a football camp at Long Beach Poly High earlier this month.

Staley noticed three-time Super Bowl champion Willie McGinest standing to his left while he spoke about building relationships and seizing opportunities.

"I told the group, when you're around guys like Willie McGinest, you need to take advantage of that opportunity and introduce yourself," Staley said about the Long Beach area legend who attended Poly and USC before winning championships with the New England Patriots. "You need to be around a guy who comes from where you come from and has achieved all that he has.

"I know I'm going to introduce myself after this because I know that there's things I'm going to learn from him."

Staley learned plenty from McGinest after a lengthy introductory chat about what it takes to win a Super Bowl and how to make a lasting impact in Southern California.

Staley plans on sharing that knowledge from McGinest – and everything he's learned in the past seven months since being hired as the Chargers' head coach – to his 86 players who were expected to report Tuesday for the start of training camp. Staley's first camp practice as a head coach is Wednesday at Jack Hammett Sports Complex in Costa Mesa.

A RELATIONSHIP-DRIVEN COACH

Staley, 38, has quickly made a name for himself as an innovative coach constantly looking to learn from others by forging genuine relationships. His giving-and-receiving approach has led to a meteoric rise since earning his first NFL coaching job with the Chicago Bears in 2017.

He's no longer the assistant coach pushing for a head coaching gig, but he continues to have the same approach and isn't leaning on his impressive credentials, which includes turning the Rams into the top-ranked defense in the NFL last season during his one-year stint as defensive coordinator.

Staley spent the offseason listening and encouraging feedback from his new Chargers players and coaching staff to gain trust and create a collaborative environment.

"It's a position that he has been working really hard for," Chargers edge rusher Joey Bosa said about his first impressions of Staley. "Now, he gets to be the head guy and run things exactly how he wants to. He wanted us to know how confident he is in us as players and how much he trusts us. He's really open to talking and suggestions. It's a great relationship that he's building so far."

Staley's defensive scheme produced winning results with the Rams, but he spent months tweaking it to fit the strengths of the Chargers' defensive roster that features Pro Bowlers Bosa, safety Derwin James and cornerback Chris Harris Jr. and emerging linebackers Kenneth Murray and Drue Tranquill. Staley took the foundation of his defensive system from Broncos coach Vic Fangio when he was his outside linebackers coach in Denver and Chicago from 2017 to 2019. But Staley didn't attempt to replicate Fangio's scheme and added his own wrinkles.

"He is his own man," said Harris when asked to compare Staley to Fangio. Staley coached Harris with the Broncos in 2019. "He is doing it the way that he wants to do it. He's more relational than Vic (Fangio). Vic is kind of closed-door. You have to work your way in with Vic. Coach Staley, he is just a very sociable guy."

Although Staley was assigned to the outside linebackers, he often asked Harris for advice during their lone season together in Denver.

"We talked all of the time, all through the year and during the season," said Harris, a four-time Pro Bowl cornerback. "He would pick my brain, 'Chris, what would you do in this coverage? What did you think on this?' We would just talk football all of the time. From there, I knew that he was a very intelligent coach. He was a very relationship-driven coach. Guys liked him.

"Then Coach Fangio always had opportunities for his assistants to have presentations. Coach Staley always had amazing presentations and always kept everybody upbeat on what he was presenting. From there, I knew that he would definitely have a great chance to be a head coach."

BLENDING IDEAS

Staley, who overcame cancer after being diagnosed with Hodgkin lymphoma at 24, presented himself as a friendly and talkative coach during a 90-minute introductory news conference with Chargers reporters in January.

Chargers assistant coaches and players have yet to see Staley shout in anger and many don't expect that to change when the games arrive – win or lose.

Defensive backs coach Derrick Ansley first worked with Staley in 2012 at the University of Tennessee when Staley was a graduate assistant. Ansley said Staley's friendly personality hasn't changed in the past decade.

"He always came off very humble, very eager to learn and asked a lot of good questions," Ansley said. "You could tell at that age that he was going to go on to bigger and better things. He was always impressive from Day 1. He hasn't changed one bit."

Staley is the latest 30-something NFL head coach with a calm demeanor. He quickly meshed with Rams coach Sean McVay last season because of their similar personalities. Staley will use what he learned from competing against McVay during Rams practices to form the best offensive system for quarterback Justin Herbert, the reigning Offensive Rookie of the Year. But Staley, a former college quarterback at Dayton and Mercyhurst University, will also collect past experiences from his coaching staff.

Quarterbacks coach Shane Day has recent success from working with Kyle Shanahan and the San Francisco 49ers the past two seasons. Offensive line coach Frank Smith made a lasting impact as a tight ends coach with the Las Vegas Raiders and was instrumental in Darren Waller's development. Offensive coordinator Joe Lombardi spent 12 of the past 14 seasons working in New Orleans with Saints coach Sean Payton, who has operated one of the most productive offenses in the NFL since 2006.

"It's been really fun to work with him because he's one of the few guys that's a defensive head coach but also played quarterback," Day said about Staley. "That's a very unique experience. I've really enjoyed having our conversations because he's bringing a lot to the room. He's shared a lot of defensive perspectives with the quarterbacks. When he's able to frame it from a quarterback's perspective, that really helps us integrate it into our thought process. I've really enjoyed a lot of our conversations."
Staley has been busy blending ideas from different perspectives to create a successful operation on the field, but it always goes back to relationships for the coach from Perry, Ohio. Taking the time to get to know his players away from football is how he got the Chargers to quickly buy in, despite his lack of head coaching experience.

BUYING IN

James immediately realized his good friend and Rams cornerback Jalen Ramsey was right about Staley when the two had their first conversation during Staley's tour of the Chargers' facility.

"Everything that I've heard, and everybody I've met through this game, had nothing but great things to say about (Staley)," James said. "Our first talk on his first day here, the day he signed with the Chargers, I remember him just bringing me up here and wanting me to be a part of his moment. For me, it's just relationships. Everything that's been said has been spot on."

Staley has embraced backgrounds and personalities by letting players be themselves. He refers to cornerback Michael Davis by his nickname "Vato," which is Spanish slang for man.

"That's what he likes to be called," Staley said about Davis, who's half Mexican. "If you know Vato, that's such a big part of his story. What you try to do is you try to tap into that, and I think what's so cool about learning L.A., Southern California is that Mexican American, that Latino population is such a huge part of the fabric of this place and what makes it so cool.

"So the fact that we have a player that's half Mexican and what that means to people, because he's so proud of his heritage, yeah, I'm going to tap into that."

Staley has made all the right moves when it comes to building relationships and installing his systems this offseason, but the next phase of his challenge as a first-time head coach is getting his team prepared during training camp as games quickly approach.

RELYING ON TRUST

Staley will have plenty on his plate as the team's defensive play caller, but he plans on leaning on the trust he has with his coaching staff, specifically defensive coordinator Renaldo Hill, who will be in the booth while Staley calls plays on the field.

"I've learned so much from him and we have such a strong professional relationship and personal relationship," Staley said about Hill. "I think having that upstairs perspective as a coordinator, there's going to be things that I think he can help me with between series. … He can talk to the defensive staff from an adjustment standpoint when my big-picture focus then transitions to (special) teams or offense and I think we've done a lot of trial runs in the spring camp.

"I can't emphasize how special of a coach he is and how much he's meant to our staff and our players."

Staley has quickly risen through the coaching ranks because he listens and wants others to succeed with him. That formula helped him as a small-program college coach at John Carroll University and James Madison and he hasn't gone away from that in the NFL.

The relationships and trust Staley has created since being hired as head coach will dictate how the Chargers go in 2021.

Chargers' new leader a family man: 'I am from the Bruce and Linda Staley coaching tree'

By Jeff Miller
Los Angeles Times
February 5, 2021

It was a single line — just 10 words — from a news conference that stretched beyond an hour and a half:

"I am from the Bruce and Linda Staley coaching tree."

When Detroit unveiled its new head coach on Jan. 21, the guy talked about biting kneecaps and kicking teeth, Dan Campbell's bizarre fit of passion stirring national attention.

On the same day, just a short time later, almost no one noticed when Brandon Staley was introduced by the Chargers and talked about his mom and dad, calling them "my heroes."

This is a coach whose first NFL job came with the 2017 Chicago Bears and noted defensive mind Vic Fangio.

When he was coaching collegiately at John Carroll, Staley was so enamored with Fangio's concepts that he would finish his meetings and game-planning, and rush off to study whatever Fangio was up to next.

Back then, Fangio was San Francisco's defensive coordinator and catching the 49ers on television in Ohio sometimes meant having to go to a nearby sports bar, where Staley would sit alone in wonderment.

After the 2018 season, Fangio left Chicago to become the head coach in Denver and took two assistants with him. One of them was Staley.

Barely a year later, Staley was hired by the Rams to be their defensive coordinator and brought along everything he had learned from his handpicked mentor.

Still, when asked to declare his roots, Staley put family over football, which is understandable given how much this family, bonded by hard reality, has persevered together and kept alive a tradition of teaching.

"I am from the Bruce and Linda Staley coaching tree."

That is Brandon Staley's line and this is the story behind that line.

Everyone else saw him coaching Jalen Ramsey that day, in a moment especially poignant and peeved.

Television cameras showed Staley reasoning with the Rams' all-everything cornerback shortly after Green Bay had taken a one-touchdown lead on an Aaron Rodgers pass.

Ramsey, his team en route to a crushing 32-18 NFC divisional-round playoff loss last month, was visibly upset on the field and now well short of pleased on the sideline.

Sitting at home just outside Pittsburgh, nearly 700 miles from Lambeau Field, Jason Staley watched his twin brother coaching, too, but saw something else entirely.

He saw the woman whose impact was so profound on the Chargers' new coach that it resonates still today, nearly 17 years after her death.

"Watching Brandon teach those guys, I get a little bit of my mom back," Jason said. "I get to see that, and it's just so cool. It's the reason I pay whatever DIRECTV charges me to get his games."

Linda Staley taught sixth-grade English in northeast Ohio before the breast cancer won, ending her 9½-year battle against a disease doctors estimated would take her life in less than one year.

Bruce Staley also was a teacher — fourth-grade math — before he and Linda learned their first child instead would be children, twin boys. A combined annual income of $22,000 wasn't going to work for a household about to double in size.

So Bruce took a second job that eventually became a second career in adhesive materials. He was a coach, too, mostly AAU basketball, working with the twins from fifth grade through their junior years at Perry High, about a 45-minute drive from Cleveland.

He always had an even, measured demeanor on the bench and an equally steady point guard on the floor, Brandon possessing sublime ball-handling skills and the sort of passing ability that led to him setting assist records in high school.

Two decades later, while watching the Rams play the Packers, Jason said he laughed more than once at the images of his brother at work.

"He looks like my dad, kind of stalking the basketball sideline," Jason, 38, said. "It's like a flashback: 'That's my dad. That's what he would do.' "

Brandon knew only two positions growing up: point guard and quarterback. He was the sort of player who almost never was taken out of a game. He was athletic but — at 6 feet, 160 pounds — there just wasn't enough of him.

So he ended up at Dayton, which plays non-scholarship football, arriving as a fifth- or sixth-stringer. During that first year, buried on the depth chart, Brandon attempted to walk on to the school's Division I basketball team. He made the final two before being cut.

He'd end up starting for two seasons in football, operating the Flyers' option offense, being voted a captain and winning 16 of 21 games.

"He was as good as any player we had on the chalkboard," said Mike Kelly, Dayton's coach at the time. "He would always ask why. Most athletes don't ask why. It's, 'OK, Coach, got it,' and they just go to it. Brandon wanted to know why all the time."

The call to return home came during Brandon's junior year. It was his father. Mom was dying. Originally diagnosed with 21 cancerous lymph nodes, Linda's fight had been an extended and courageous one.

The disease showed up when the twins were 11 and not quite two months after they'd lost an aunt, Ann Maltarich, also to breast cancer. The first two years weren't as bad as the seven that followed as Linda's condition intensified, even as she long outlived the forecasts.

"An incredible will," said Bruce, a two-time cancer survivor himself. "Nothing ever negative, either. Not a 'why me' kind of thing. Incredible resolve. Just graceful. That's what I saw."

Linda would spend weeks at a time in the hospital, typically isolated and communicating with her three children — the Staleys have a younger son, Michael — mostly through journals the boys would write.

So they didn't always see the pain, but seeing the struggle was as unavoidable as the sound of their mother in the bathroom getting sick again. Jason said he never saw his father cry, those tears also coming only in private.

"That kind of fight leaves a mark," Jason said. "As kids, you see that and there's no way that doesn't affect you. When you think back to how they handled it and how she fought, those are the things that empower us."

At his introductory news conference, Brandon called his mother "the most graceful, loving, strongest person I know." He also said she remains his inspiration today "as a coach, as a father, as a husband."

He didn't include "as a teacher" but only because there's little difference between teaching and coaching to Brandon, who became more than a son to Linda after she was diagnosed. He and his brothers also became her students.

No longer able to work, Linda taught her sons instead, showing them the importance of building relationships with students and recognizing how each one learns and then using that foundation to build something special.

"She's the best teacher I've ever seen, certainly," Brandon said. "She was always able to reach people that were more difficult to reach. Seeing that up close when I was a little kid, I saw the power in that. I've tried to embody a lot of that as a coach."

The lesson remains powerful today and so, too, does the memory of Linda's goodbye. Jason said the turnout at her funeral was eye-opening in the number of lives his mother touched, all that love expressed after she died on Valentine's Day 2004.

Two busloads of players arrived from Dayton and two more from Mercyhurst College, where Jason played linebacker and was student body vice president. Jason that day even had to help a few of his teammates tie their ties.

"You would have thought the funeral was for a superstar," Bruce, 63, said. "The line to get in this place was unbelievable. It was more than you could have hoped for. I'm sure she would have been thrilled."

Mercyhurst is a small liberal arts school in Erie, Pa., hardly known for its athletes but famous for its underdog. Former heavyweight champion Buster Douglas was recruited to play basketball for the Lakers in the early 1980s before giving up hoops for boxing.

In 2005, the school was home to another long shot — a reunion of the Staley twins, Brandon

transferring to play football with his brother one final time, both now graduate students.

They lived together and worked out together, even took a class together. Jason had considered not using his final season of eligibility, but Brandon talked him out of it.

Marty Schaetzle wrote all about the twins that season for one of the school's game-day programs. He knew their story well since Schaetzle also is the Lakers' football coach.

"I think once they lost their mom, they really realized the value of family and time," he said. "I think they believed it would be a very good thing to play one more time together. We were fortunate to be able to make that happen."

Brandon practically dragged Jason to watch film with him and catch his passes. As one of the team's new captains, Jason had no choice but go along, refusing to be outworked by someone who had just arrived on campus.

He also had no interest in looking bad in front of his big brother. See, Brandon is the older twin, by two minutes. Still, there were times when big brother was almost too driven.

"He was a classroom rat, a film rat," Schaetzle recalled of Brandon. "It was natural for him to try to put everything together, from the protections to the routes to what was going on in the backfield. It came to him very naturally."

By that point, Brandon was on his coaching path and, the next year, was a graduate assistant at Northern Illinois. Those 2006 Huskies made the Poinsettia Bowl.

It was on that trip to San Diego that the night sweats and the flu-like symptoms turned worse. Brandon, who also had a growth in his chest, called his dad, and Bruce remembers telling him, "You need to get home and get home now."

The doctors determined it was lymphoma.

"As a twin brother, it's the worst day of your life, scariest moment of your life," Jason said. "I'm feeling guilty because I don't have it. I would have given anything, anything to take that cancer out of him and put it into me."

These twins would eventually serve as each other's best man. They got engaged only two weeks apart and married just six weeks from one another.

They competed plenty as kids but, more often, teamed up. Brandon was always the better athlete. Yet, to this day, the only thing that really bothers Jason is the fact that Brandon, despite being an inch shorter, was the one who could dunk a basketball.

Brandon now calls the six months of chemotherapy and six weeks of radiation that followed his "cancer journey." He phoned his twin brother after every treatment, reassuring Jason that things would work out, the patient also the healer.

As a former college quarterback evolved into an NFL defensive coordinator, Brandon has been touted for his ability to see football from both sides. His vision goes even deeper than that.

"I looked at it as a chance to compete," Brandon said of his diagnosis. "It was a chance that could really bring out all the best in me. When you get to the other side of it, there's an energy, there's a strength, there's a feeling that you can do anything that you dream of. That's what I've been trying to do every day since."

And now, he's the Chargers' head coach, a young, sharp leader ready to pair with Justin Herbert, the team's young, sharp quarterback.

Brandon's first call after accepting the job was to his wife, Amy. His second was to Herbert.

On the day he was introduced by the Chargers, Brandon called Herbert again, this time for a video chat, explaining later that he wanted to loop in his quarterback as a way of gaining Herbert's trust.

The call included not only Brandon but also Amy and couple's three young sons — Colin, Will and Grant.

"That meant a lot to me," Herbert said. "He had so many other things to do that day. To set aside some time like that was special. I thought that was a pretty cool moment."

They talked family and relationships before they talked football, this disciple of Vic Fangio leaning instead on the lessons from home, the lessons taught by his most favorite of teachers.

At the Perry Cemetery, a family friend recently hung a Chargers lanyard over Linda's gravestone and sent the twins a photo.

Thinking back to his mother, Brandon said, "She's not here, but she's with me."

And that won't change anytime soon, not for someone who comes from a coaching tree carved from his family tree.

A brother's promise and the D-II season that led Brandon Staley to the Chargers

By Daniel Popper
The Athletic
March 23, 2021

Mitch Phillis was still learning, and like any 19-year-old college sophomore, he had questions. But he was afraid of asking a dumb one to his superior — in this case, his football coach.

Phillis had taken over as Division II Mercyhurst College's starting quarterback four games into the 2005 season. He was developing, there was no doubt about that. But his coach was demanding, and Phillis did not want to mar his progress with public embarrassment. So in the film room, as his coach toggled through cut-ups of an exotic defensive coverage, Phillis bit his tongue.

Luckily, he had a human answer key sitting next to him: Brandon Staley, a fifth-year grad transfer backup quarterback who, despite being only 22, already was an encyclopedia of football schematics. The film session would wrap up, and later, Phillis would find Staley in the locker room to ask the questions that had been eating at him. Staley would happily oblige: It was a split coverage, of course. Man on one side, zone on the other.

Problem solved. Embarrassment avoided.

Fifteen years before he was hired to lead the Los Angeles Chargers, Staley's remarkable capacity for teaching, distilling and communicating information already was there — it just had to be uncovered. He had started two games earlier in the fall while Phillis dealt with a training camp injury, but once Phillis was healthy, he returned under center, and Staley was faced with the finality of his playing career.

Instead of wallowing, though, Staley did what was natural, what he always was destined to do.

"He just started coaching," says his twin brother Jason.

Jason Staley was ready to break up with football. His mother, Linda, died on Valentine's Day in 2004 after a long battle with breast cancer. "She approached just a truly awful disease with an amount of grace that is really hard to put into words," Jason said.

Jason, a linebacker, spent the 2004 season at Mercyhurst that fall, but he had lost his desire to keep playing.

"I hit the point where I loved football but I wasn't in love with football anymore," he said. "That's a tough realization because you've been playing the game since you were 6. It's even tougher to make the decision to walk away."

Jason was done, and he told his brother, his "best friend" who had just finished his second winning season as Dayton's starting quarterback and who, like Jason, had one more year of eligibility

But his brother was having none of it. Brandon knew Jason would regret giving up that final season for the rest of his life. So he offered a solution.

“I’ll come play with you,” Brandon said.

“Excuse me?’” Jason replied in shock.

Brandon could have stayed at Dayton. But the brothers, inseparable from birth, had spent the last four years apart. They were still grieving for their mother, a sixth-grade English teacher who had instilled in them the value of work ethic and empathy. Brandon wanted to be there for his twin. And so they decided to spend this final season at Mercyhurst, together.

Brandon graduated from Dayton in May. He was in Erie, Pa., days later, moving in with his brother for the first time since they were 18. Brandon picked up a summer job moving furniture around campus. And he picked up Mercyhurst’s hefty playbook, literally and figuratively.

The first time Phillis sat down to watch film with Staley, he was surprised to realize the newcomer already had learned the Lakers’ intricate pro-style offense.

“We did not have anybody like him,” Jason said.

That was evident within days — in the weight room, on the field, in the film room.

“I probably learned more in that summer about studying opponents than I had in the prior four years combined,” said John Egbert, a receiver on that 2005 team. “And it just really was evident that he was a different level of cat.”

Brandon was instrumental in organizing regular 7-on-7 games between the Mercyhurst offense and defense, what Egbert described as “epic, epic duels” every Sunday. Those days were transformative for the whole team.

“A lot of competition,” said Jeff Nowling, who entered 2005 as the starting quarterback. “A lot of jawing at one another.”

Because most of the players grew up locally, those not staying on campus drove to Erie for those scrimmages, including Phillis, who came to a sudden realization about Brandon.

“This guy’s been getting after it,” Phillis said. “He knows the offense already. He’s been working on that. He’s not coming into camp, like, oh, I’ll learn it in camp. He was someone that was like, I’m going to know this before camp, and he was on it.”

Brandon galvanized the team to train harder and more frequently. He threw every day with teammates.

The day Brandon got to the Mercyhurst football office, Egbert walked into the weight room and saw his new teammate doing Olympic lifts with a barbell while balancing on one leg. Egbert looked on in bewilderment. What are you doing over there?

The previous summer, before Brandon’s arrival, Egbert thought he had made dramatic strides through his workouts.

“We probably did half the amount of work that we did the summer that Brandon came in,” Egbert said.

Trying to find any way to get on the field, Brandon took reps at safety during those 7-on-7 games to sharpen his defensive versatility. He had only ever played quarterback.
“He could play any position,” Nowling said. “He was very athletic.”

Brandon still spent enough time in the playbook to grasp the complex offense at warp speed.

“I remember within a week or two,” Egbert said, “not only was he teaching concepts to the other QBs who had been in the room for one, two or in some cases three years, some of the offensive assistants, like our wide receivers coach, he was teaching things to.”

Brandon Zangaro, a two-way player on that 2005 team, was not in Erie for the summer. When he arrived for the start of training camp, Brandon Staley had already mastered far more than just the quarterback’s duties. He knew the responsibilities of every player on the field.

“You know his intelligence and his Xs and Os are next level within the first 30 seconds of speaking with him,” Zangaro said. “You have a guy transferring in, there’s going to be some skepticism. Who’s this guy? He hasn’t been here the past four years doing what we’ve all been doing. But that didn’t happen, because everybody knew.”

Including Joe Lombardi.

Lombardi joined the Mercyhurst staff in 2002 when Marty Schaetzle took over as head coach. And though he was coaching at a small Division II liberal arts school, Lombardi, the grandson of legend Vince Lombardi, still had Super Bowl expectations.

“Every day, every week, it seemed like he thought he was in the NFL,” Egbert said. “I think in his mind he was walking out to Heinz Field instead of Tullio Field in Erie, Pennsylvania.”

Lombardi demanded perfect recall. He ran Bill Walsh-inspired perfect-play drills to end practice, where one minor misstep — like running a route at 14 yards of depth instead of 15 yards — required another repetition. He scripted his first 20 plays every game when no one in Division II was implementing that level of preparation.

One day at practice, Lombardi watched a play unfold that reminded him of a film clip he showed his team two months prior. He asked Phillis if he remembered it — well, more like demanded if he remembered it.

(This might explain why Phillis would go to Staley with his questions.)

“I was kind of like, ‘Ummm, I don’t remember that specific play,’” Phillis remembers. “He was the type that was like, ‘How could you not remember that? If you see it once, you should know it forever.’”

Thinking back, Egbert still marvels at Lombardi’s attention to detail.

“Football is in his blood,” Egbert added. “But honestly, there’s more football in his brain than in his blood.”

Staley, meanwhile, was enthralled. The two football junkies connected almost immediately.

“I really fell in love with studying the game,” Staley said of his time with Lombardi at Mercyhurst. “I felt like Joe was an outstanding teacher. I felt like he was really progressive at that time. I had never been around an offense like that, that really challenged the quarterback from a mental standpoint, from a preparation standpoint.

“I love that. I couldn’t get enough of it.”

Specifically, Lombardi offered a diverse and layered NFL-inspired playbook that differed from the option-heavy offense Staley ran at Dayton. The quarterback had much more control at the line of scrimmage, sometimes having as many as 20 possible audibles or checks at his disposal.

“He was always trying to learn,” Nowling said of Staley. “He wanted to eat it up. So he asked a million questions. … Brandon’s questions sparked a different thought in Coach Lombardi.”

“The way that Joe talked to Brandon, he knew he could put more on him than other guys,” Egbert said. “He would feed him more, he would pick his brain more. He talked to him more as a peer than a player because he really respected his knowledge.”

The connection grew over that season, and Lombardi trusted Staley’s understanding of the offense. That formed an avenue to the field for Staley. With Phillis injured, Staley replaced Nowling, the starter, in the second half of the season opener with the Lakers trailing, 28-10, to Gannon. He led an early second-half touchdown drive, but four fourth-quarter turnovers prevented a comeback.

The following week, Staley entered for Nowling in the second quarter against Northern Michigan. He helped erase a five-point deficit, and Mercyhurst took its first lead of the season. But turnovers, again, were the culprit in a loss. Staley started the next week and nearly led the Lakers to a win over 18th-ranked Michigan Tech. He gained over 100 yards on the ground and threw for 192 yards, a touchdown and two interceptions.

Phillis then replaced Staley in the fourth quarter the following week with Mercyhurst trailing Northwood, 35-0. Staley’s final snaps at quarterback came two weeks later in relief of Phillis against Ashland. Staley took snaps at quarterback in five of the first six games of the season. The Lakers went 0-7 to start the year. They had a young defense that gave up at least 40 points in seven of 10 games the season.

But the Staley-Lombardi relationship was a bright spot in the disappointment. Staley had earned that trust over the course of that season, in the film room and on the practice field, even after he lost the starting job for the second time.

“Brandon was just there,” Jason said. “He showed up to every practice and soaked up everything from Coach Lombardi. It was like hell trying to stop him. … He really knew he wanted to go into coaching after interacting with Coach Lombardi.”

In 2009, when Staley was an assistant at Division III St. Thomas, he traveled to New Orleans to visit with Lombardi, then the Saints quarterbacks coach. Staley embedded in the Saints QB room for a week with Lombardi and Drew Brees. Lombardi long had been an advocate for Staley in NFL coaching circles, including with Ed Donatell, with whom Lombardi coached on the Falcons staff in 2006. Staley ended up getting his first NFL gig as the outside linebackers coach for the Bears in 2017 with Vic Fangio, and Donatell, a longtime Fangio assistant, was on that staff.

“He really taught me the game at a high level,” Staley said of Lombardi. “Protections, the run game, how do these concepts fit together, how can we get in and out of plays. At that time, that’s kind of where my love for coaching offensive football really came, was from him, because I loved playing for him and I learned so much and he made me better. And I think that we saw the game the same way, and that relationship has really stood the test of time.”

“They were really good memories,” Lombardi said. “He was awfully smart and fun to be around.”

Staley’s decision to play with his brother in turn helped facilitate the relationship that led to perhaps the most important hire of his life.

Justin Herbert’s development is a priority as the Chargers enter a pivotal offseason. That responsibility will fall largely on the shoulders of his offensive coordinator: Joe Lombardi.

“There are so many coaching trees built up and circles crossing, and you hear about people hiring people they know all the time,” Egbert said. “But this does seem unique, doesn’t it?”

Zangaro broke his leg midway through the 2005 season and had a front row seat to Staley’s transformation.

He watched practice as the backup quarterback, completely comfortable in his teaching role, groomed Phillis and connected with his teammates.

Staley was finding his coaching voice.

“He’s got it. He’s just got it,” Zangaro remembered thinking at that moment. “The way that he communicates and his ability to communicate with different people at different levels, it was unparalleled.”

Phillis’ growth was most evident. And Zangaro, from his sideline seat, knew Staley played a crucial part.

Phillis, a self-proclaimed pocket passer, even scored a rushing touchdown that season when he pump-faked a linebacker and dove over the goal line. He said he picked up the move from watching Staley in training camp.

As Zangaro thinks back now, he witnessed a man born to coach football embarking on a journey that would carry him to the very pinnacle of the professional.

“You knew what he was going to do,” Zangaro said, “and where he was going to go.”

Brandon Staley Q&A: Chargers coach on developing player relationships, Justin Herbert, OTAs install and more

By Jourdan Rodrigue
The Athletic
July 12, 2021

OCEANSIDE, Calif. — Brandon Staley couldn’t keep still.

The Los Angeles Chargers’ head coach — hired away from the Rams in January and preparing to open his first NFL training camp in that role — stopped for a day at the QB Collective coaching and quarterback summit in Oceanside as the event’s keynote speaker and to help facilitate an ongoing dialogue about scheme, philosophy and trends among several competing NFL coaches.

As the event unfolded Saturday morning, some coaches, including 49ers offensive coordinator Mike McDaniel, 49ers quarterbacks coach Rich Scangarello and Chargers defensive coordinator Renaldo Hill, sat around a large wooden table and dissected the merits of 49ers head coach Kyle Shanahan’s offensive system and how it juxtaposes to and clashes schematically with Staley’s defensive system — itself a mad scientist-escaped-from-the-laboratory amalgamation of Broncos defensive coordinator Vic Fangio’s system. A dozen other coaches and league personnel sat on couches that were set up around the perimeter of the table, joining in the conversation and occasionally scribbling notes.

The young quarterbacks in the room stared wide-eyed at the coaches, their eyes darting back to Staley, who paced and gestured at the front of the room as he spoke about his background and offered advice on a player’s journey to the NFL as well as a coach’s. When the teaching portion ended and the quarterbacks left, film was turned on and the real chatter among the coaches began. The dialogue was respectful but rippled with electricity as they watched cut-ups of their teams clashing on a large screen positioned at the head of the table. Staley moved to one of the couches but would hop up to the table when the conversation got juicy, unable to help himself from quite literally jumping into the ideas presented.

That, as it turned out, was only the first part of his weekend. He also swung by a seven-on-seven tournament in Long Beach the next day. The Athletic caught up with him in between events to see how his first offseason as a head coach has gone, how he’s developing relationships with his players — including, of course, collaborating with second-year quarterback Justin Herbert, the reigning NFL rookie of the year — what his approach to installing his plan in spring workouts has been and how he has set about planting the first seeds of his coaching philosophy as the Chargers prepare for camp on July 27.

Note: This conversation has been lightly edited for length and clarity.

You’re about to jump into it. I know you’ve been preparing, and you had the draft and spring ball, but this is where it starts to get into the real year. Does it feel that way to you?

I think, from a head coaching perspective, that scheduling is really a big part of the job. I think that knowing how far in front of these things you have to be, from a planning and really from a performance standpoint — like some of these nontraditional weeks where you’re going from a Sunday to a Thursday, a Sunday to a Monday, coming off a bye week, going into a bye week — some of that long-term planning and working with our coaching staff and our sports performance team and our personnel department, I think that makes you feel like, “Hey, this is coming. This is happening.”

I pour a lot of time and energy into that because I want our players to know the reason behind everything we do. I feel like I put a lot of time and effort into organizing schedules, whether it’s practice or installation or training camp — or some of these travel schedules, (like) going from a Pacific to an East Coast time slot where it’s a 10 a.m. start time — and putting a lot of energy into that. That’s been a big part of making it feel real. You’re making these schedules because it’s coming fast.

From a microscopic point of view, which is how I prefer to think about it, it’s just about getting training camp off the ground. That’s what’s coming first. That’s been a lot of fun for me. I feel like that’s a sweet spot for me because I like being able to build things. That’s been exciting.

What are a couple of moments in which you’ve started to see the building blocks you’re stacking?

You know, over the summer, (safety) Derwin James had his first child. You know the depth of the relationship you have with him when he sends you the picture of that baby boy from the hospital. And at the same time, he’s watching Washington Football Team film against the Rams! And, you know, asking questions about our game plan and what he’s seeing on tape from them — while he’s in the hospital. I think that shows you’re maybe doing something right.

Just being able to connect with (receiver) Keenan Allen at the U.S. Open. I brought my brother in from Pittsburgh — he had just been named a partner at his firm — and so I surprised him with a trip out here to go to the third round of the U.S. Open. And being able to connect with Keenan at the tournament and walk the course with him and my twin brother, I think you have a strong sense of where you stand with a guy like that — how he has accepted you and where his frame of mind is — a guy who is one of the premier players in the game. Just so excited to compete with him. I feel like, in just a short amount of time, we’ve been able to get really close. Those are the things that I really, really enjoy.

With relationship-building being such a huge part of what you’re doing now, how do you do that authentically?

I think you just do it slowly. I think you do it daily. I don’t think it’s ever one big moment, just a lot of little moments. I think it’s just acknowledging everybody that you see and the small conversations that let everybody know that you’re aware of them and who they are and listening to them.

We had Austin Proehl, who we signed (after the draft) from North Carolina, who is best friends with Mitch Trubisky (who Staley knew during his time in Chicago as an outside linebackers coach), who is from where I'm from in Ohio, and valuing him the same way that I do Keenan Allen and getting to know him. (Center) Corey Linsley, he had a baby a couple of weeks ago back in Columbus, and he was able to come back and forth during the spring. (His wife) Anna and my wife kind of got to know each other. So, you do the best you can with everybody and know that each relationship is different; it has a life of its own. And all you can do is make sure that you do the best you can with all of the people that you're with and knowing that they're all different. And the more you get to know them, you'll know how much or how little of a relationship you'll have with them. It can't be the same with everybody. … But the fact that you have one is what's most important to me.

Really, I think (you can) learn a lot through your coaching staff. Your coaching staff can have a more intimate view of their position group. … It's daily. That's a big part of your role as the head coach is to have the pulse of your team — not only your players but your coaching staff. It takes a lot of investment, and I'm sort of built for that. That's what I really like to do.

I even heard that offensive line coach Frank Smith moved his office so it's like an entry and exit point of the building for the linemen.

Yeah, we want to live the mission. We talk about "our way" being relationships and competition, and if that's going to be at the forefront of everything that we do, then each individual coach in their own way has to make that a big part of their own mission statement. I think why Frank is a special coach is that he understands how to connect with his guys. He understands what a dynamic group an O-line room is and how different all of these personalities are. And the best way that you can connect with people is being available — a great way to be available is to be with them.

Frank knows that sometimes when a player comes upstairs to a coach's office, he feels differently than when he's downstairs in a meeting room. It feels like a more welcoming environment where (they) can be themselves; (they) don't have to be sort of a manufactured self. You see that a lot in the NFL; people are putting on a front — they're playing a part in a movie — they're not necessarily being their authentic, full self. I think what (Frank) has done with our group is open himself up, and I think by doing that, it's opened them up. Now our lines of communication are open in a way that wouldn't be possible if he were upstairs all the time. They can stay later with him; they can come earlier. He has a central command center down there for them and with (assistant offensive line coach) Shaun Sarrett, and I think it's Frank's way of making the relationship part really big.

Do you think that helps, having multiple spaces like that where guys can just be around each other, learn about each other, understand each other — not just player to player but coach to player?

Yeah, and that's why I tell our coaches to go work out when the players are working out. I was like, "You'll be surprised what you can find out from observing them or being a part of a workout session where you can maybe talk about something just briefly that will end up helping your day out." I think a lot of people look down on that or laugh at me, turn their nose up, whatever. There's a lot of cynical people out there. What I encouraged our staff to do is to be around our guys if they're into what we're doing. … If we can always stay current with them, then we're going to create a lot of solutions to these really tough problems that we're going to have. I don't believe in coaches hanging out together all day. I know that's not the way. The way is to be around your players as much as they can, and our coaches have kind of given life to that.

I shared a bunch of stories about when I was with (Rams star cornerback Jalen) Ramsey. I made a 90-play cut-up last March of him, from Florida State all the way to the 2019 Rams: good plays, bad plays, in the middle, press, off, tackling, effort, leadership stuff, his role for the Rams. On two hours, on a Zoom call in the beginning of the pandemic, that's where it started for us, because he knew that I was invested in his game. I shared with him, I said, "I don't think that I would be here without Jalen Ramsey." And it was a moment like that that led to a lot of other really big and small moments along the way that allowed him and us to have a great year — that let him know that you're thinking about him, that it's personal. I don't see how you can do this job if you don't make it personal. (Voice raises.) I just don't, Jourdan. I don't see how you can do it well.

I remember how collaborative your relationship with Jalen was, too.

I use that word — "express themselves" — because I mean it. It's a partnership. That's why I love the NFL. You have to make sure that that guy has a big voice in how you do things, because he can help you. He can see a lot of things that are happening out there that can really help you. You can say, "Hey, we can do this one of two ways." And then he makes the way that he wants work. We're always going to be wired that way. "We've got two really good solutions. What are you more comfortable with?"

I just think that's the best way to do business. And then you're always current during the week, and then when you get to the signal caller meetings that he and I had all the time, they were like quarterback meetings where he's ranking the third downs. "Hey, these are the coverages I like the best. This is where I want to be in the red area." So he's fully aware of why we're doing everything and there's no surprises for him on game day. I think that collaboration is ultimately why we had the year that we had. He had a huge impact on me.

And I want to tie that thread over to the other side because of your quarterback. If we're tying thread together, translating that type of collaboration over to Herbert, I imagine that's the most important thing you two can do is to collaborate in that manner.

A big part of it is that I know our offense. I know how we call things, I know why we call them that way, from a formation standpoint to a protection standpoint to a route concept standpoint, so I can speak his language on a day-to-day basis. And then, I feel like a big contribution from me is to help him identify defenses and how people play and what their rules are. "These are the personnel groupings that they play. These are their fronts they play, the coverages they play, the pressure packages they have. Here's a couple defenders who can tell you what's happening. Here's why it's happening." And offer him that second part of his education where, yeah, he's learning it from Joe (Lombardi) and Shane (Day). But I'm the checks and balances that offers him that other perspective — and a fresh perspective. And I think that with Justin, it's: "Do you prepare the path for the player or the player for the path?" And I want to prepare the player for the path, not the path for the player.

I don't want to make it easy for Justin; I want to make it right for him. And so on the front end, I'll say, "Hey, man, we're going to challenge you. We're going to push you." Because ultimately, I know that for us to be as good as we can be, (he) has to be the one running the show for us. And (him) just knowing that, as his head coach, I have his back and we're going to work through it during the week together and hopefully I can give him that full perspective where he can become a complete player.

When you guys talk, how do you talk to each other?

A lot of it is keeping it light, talking about our day to day. And I think that's where it starts: from a personal perspective. From a ball perspective. Just asking a lot of questions and being a part of the conversation and the dialogue. And he knows that my door is open and my cellphone is on for all of those things that come up for him. I think everyone wants to make it this big thing, but that's not how it is; they're little things. Little things that add up to the big things, and ultimately, that's where you know you trust one another — when it's not like (you're only reaching out over) big stuff. It's small stuff that happens over time.

I think, over the course of OTAs, what was awesome was being able to be in all of those quarterback meetings. I felt like Justin got a lot better. I felt like he learned a lot more about not only our offense but our defense. I could say, "Hey, this is why, offensively, we really like this. This is why we do this, because it's really good against this." When you can speak that part of the language, it's not like you're some sort of "defensive coach." You're just his coach. Right? And I think that's just a goal of mine was to establish, "I'm a coach. Not just a defensive coach." I'm his coach, just like I'm Derwin James' coach. And I've really enjoyed that.

Which phase of the on-field "building" process are you in right now?

We talked about in the springtime really trying to push it from an installation standpoint, to really introduce our football scheme, our technique and our situational foundation. What we wanted to do was teach our guys a lot of football and install a lot. We were not going full speed, so what we did was we two-spotted the field so that everybody on the team could be working. That was done intentionally so that everybody was developing. Not just part of the team; the whole team was developing. We didn't have to worry about the full speed of 11-on-11, the full speed of that, the anxiety, not to mention the health and safety stuff. What we were able to do was really install a lot more offense and defense. … There's a lot of information that they're responsible for, so they have to come to the facility ready. They're responsible for a lot. So in a traditional OTA (practice), they may get 10 to 15 plays. Well, they were getting 65 to 75 plays that they were having to operate against a great offense or defense. If you just do the math on that, you're getting five times as many snaps every day.

On the front end, it was a lot harder for our players because we ended up installing as much defense as we had for the Green Bay playoff game (with the Rams). We ended up installing that much. But what it did was it introduced our players to what we do and why we do it. I think that our players, although it was challenging for them, they benefited greatly because now when it goes live in training camp, they know what to do because they've done it. There isn't anything they have not been exposed to from a baseline of installation, because at the end of the day, you just want these guys to be able to perform their best and express themselves, and then for you as a coaching staff to figure out what everyone is best at. We were able to establish our way of playing, and our guys are going to feel very confident in operating our systems in all three phases because we put a lot of stuff in. It wasn't smothering or overwhelming because the physical part wasn't a part of the equation. I felt like I got really good feedback from the players because we engineered this as a coaching staff first and then went to our (player) leadership council (about it).

As you saw last year with the Rams, I feel like we spent a lot of time thinking about how to build things. Like, a lot of time. Like, way more time than you could ever imagine. And I feel like that's why it usually works out OK. I think if you build things properly, you're going to be more prepared for all of the things you're going to (experience) in the league.

Mom's influence inspires ex-Flyer's meteoric rise to NFL head coach

By Tom Archdeacon
Dayton Daily News
January 24, 2021

The Dayton Flyers – who'd been on a 14-game winning streak – had suffered a heartbreaking, 33-28 loss to Valparaiso at Welcome Stadium.

Brandon Staley, UD's option quarterback, had thrown for 280 yards and two touchdowns, ran for 86 yards and another score and nearly orchestrated the comeback when he drove the Flyers the length of the field in the final minutes, only to have four straight passes fall incomplete in the end zone.

After the game, he had gone around the dressing room consoling several of his teammates, but before he would talk to me he said he had to step outside to make a phone call.

As he did after every game in that 2003 football season, Staley called his mom, Linda, who was back home in their small Lake County town of Perry.

She was too ill to be at the game, but as she'd tell me that evening when we spoke, listening to the radio broadcast of the Flyers' game and especially hearing her son's voice afterward was "some of the best medicine I can get now."

A longtime English teacher, she'd been diagnosed nine years earlier with breast cancer and by that late October game things had gotten "pretty tough" for her Brandon said.

Linda didn't hold back when we spoke.

"I had three chemo treatments a week ago and I feel OK, but I don't have much energy now," she said quietly. "My cancer has metastasized to my liver and I know it's kind of scary for my boys now. They know it can be brutal.

"But Brandon knows how much I look forward to Saturdays: Listening to what he's doing out there on the field, hearing them say his name, knowing he's on the Dean's List at school, it makes me so proud.

"Saturdays I have a smile on my face."

Less than four months later – on Valentine's Day 2004 – Linda Staley passed away. She was just 46 and left three sons and Bruce, her husband of 23 years. After that emotional call back home following the Valpo game, Brandon had talked about his mom:

"You could never tell what she's fighting through because… she never gives in, never gives up."

"I draw on her strength every day. She's my inspiration."

Now, fast forward 17 years and 3 months to this past Thursday afternoon, and you heard Staley say almost the exact same thing about his mom when the Los Angeles Chargers formerly introduced him at press conference as their next head coach.

"She was an inspiration to me as a player and she is an inspiration to me as a coach and as a father and as a husband," he said on the Zoom call. "There's no possible way I would be here if it weren't for her."

Many football observers were surprised by what some called the "meteoric rise" of the 38-year-old coach. He has been in the NFL just four years. Five years ago he was an assistant coach at John Carroll University, the Division III school on Cleveland's east side.

Before he was hired last Sunday to replace Anthony Lynn, he'd never been a head coach at any level.

The Chargers interviewed five other candidates, but Staley – who had spent the past season as the defensive coordinator on Sean McVay's Los Angeles Rams staff and made the defense No. 1 in the NFL – was impressive in their interviews, said John Spanos, the president of football operations:

"He's the son of a teacher and he's the son of a coach. One of my favorite parts of the first time we sat down with Coach Staley was when he said, 'People ask me what coaching tree I consider myself a part of.'

"This is a guy who coached with some great minds in football. He worked with Vic Fangio. He coached with Sean McVay. But he says, 'I'm part of the Bruce and Linda Staley coaching tree. That's my coaching tree.'

"And I think that says a lot about Brandon. It says a lot about his character, his values and who he is."

Back in 2003, Linda talked to me about football and her family: "Football is important to our whole family. Actually, we're pretty nuts about it."

That October day had been proof. While Linda was at home, Bruce was at Mercyhurst College where Brandon's twin brother Jason was a linebacker. It was Parents Weekend so he belonged there, but he wanted to know everything that was happening with Brandon, too.

"My husband and I had a phone call going and when Dayton was on offense, I'd hold my phone up to the Internet broadcast so Bruce could listen on his cell phone," she laughed. "I got pretty animated, so I don't know what he actually heard."

That spunk his mom showed that day was something Brandon would draw on four years later – in 2007 – when he was a grad assistant at Northern Illinois and a grapefruit-sized tumor was found on his right lung. By then he'd lost his mom and aunt to breast cancer and his high school coach to the disease as well, but his dad had overcome thyroid cancer and would do the same (recently) with prostate cancer.

Brandon was diagnosed with lymphoma and when the season ended he returned to Cleveland to undergo chemotherapy. He returned to NIU for spring football, then went back home to finish his six months of chemo.

When the next season began, he drove regularly to Chicago for six weeks of radiation.

His scheduled his treatments at 7 a.m. so he could get back to campus in time for afternoon practice.

“When I went through my cancer journey…I thought of it as a chance to really bring out the best in me,” he said Thursday. “I think when you get to the other side of it, there is an energy, a strength. There is a feeling you can do anything you dream of.

“And that’s just what I’ve been trying to do every day since.”

‘I never would have been able to do it alone’

“He’s what I’d call a typical Dayton Flyers football player,” said Mike Kelly, who was UD’s celebrated head coach back then and today is an assistant athletics director at the school. “He came from a smaller school, was multi-talented and an outstanding student.”

After a stellar career at Perry High School, he was redshirted his first year at UD and the following season he was a backup. Finally, in his third year – that 2003 season – Staley won the starting job and guided the Flyers through a 9-2 campaign.

In 2004, the Flyers had added Kevin Hoyng from Coldwater. He’d go on to become the program’s all-time leader in career passing yards completions and touchdowns, but that season he and Staley split the starting duties. Although he graduated after that season, Staley still has a year of eligibility left.

“He knew he was going to be in a serious battle with Kevin, but we probably would have played both of them again,” Kelly said. “Like any young man, he wanted the spot himself, but we couldn’t guarantee that.”

He decided to transfer to Mercyhurst, whose quarterbacks’ coach was former Flyers assistant Joe Lombardi, now the QB coach of the New Orleans Saints.

It hadn’t been easy for Staley to leave Dayton, especially because of the way people reached out to him when his mom died.

“We brought two busloads of players – maybe 50 or 60 guys – up to the funeral,” Kelly said. “It was a very emotional time for Brandon and his family.”

Staley reflected on that Thursday: “I never would have been able to do it alone.”

But in going to Mercyhurst, he became the starting quarterback, got to play with his brother and was a lot closer to his dad since Perry was just 70 minutes away from the Erie, Pa. campus.

His dad had been a longtime high school coach and that’s something that always intrigued Brandon.

“I started drinking coffee in the first grade and reading the sports page,” he laughed. “I wanted to be just like my dad.”

‘The best teacher I’ve ever seen’

During spring football drills in 2003, Staley registered the highest vertical jump on the UD team. And in landing now with the Chargers, it’s evident he hasn’t lost his hops as a coach.

“I’ve been around for three decades coaching and every once in a while a young, bright guy who sees the game globally comes around,” Ed Donatell, the Denver Broncos defensive coordinator and a two-time Super Bowl winner, told the Denver Post. “(Staley) sees offense, defense, special teams and he knows how they work … It’s an extraordinary job of teaching (to get the Rams defense atop the NFL.) He’s a young, bright mind that sees it all and can communicate with people.”

After starting out as a defensive assistant at Northern Illinois, Staley became a defensive line and special teams coach at D-III St. Thomas University in Minnesota, then spent two seasons at Hutchinson Community College in Kansas and year as a grad assistant at Tennessee.

In 2013 he was hired as the defensive coordinator at John Carroll. He made a one-season detour to James Madison, then returned to John Carroll. In 2016, he planned to join JCU coach Tom Arth at Tennessee-Chattanooga when Vic Fangio of the Chicago Bears called.

Two seasons later he followed Fangio to Denver and last season he was hired by McVay, whose granddad, John McVay, had been the Flyers coach for eight season in the 1960s and ’70s and later, as San Francisco’s VP and director of football operations, helped lead the 49ers to five Super Bowl titles.

“I hardly know anything about professional football, but what amazes me is it’s such a tight knit group of people,” Kelly said. “There’s a lot of networking.”

And the Dayton Flyers are now a part of that network. When he was 30, Sean McVay – who went to Ascension School in Kettering – became the youngest head coach ever in the NFL. At 33, he was the youngest Super Bowl coach.

Part of his grandpa’s staff at UD was Jim Gruden, whose son Jon would be a back-up quarterback for Kelly’s UD teams in the 1980s and later won the Super Bowl as the Tampa Bay Buccaneers coach. He now coaches of the Las Vegas Raiders.Before him, Chuck Noll, the former Flyers lineman of the 1950s, won four Super Bowls as the Pittsburgh Steelers head coach and is enshrined in the Pro Football Hall of Fame.

Jon Gruden now has Austin King, a former Flyers assistant, on his staff. And this evening former Flyers’ center Terry Heffernan will help coach the Buffalo Bills line in the AFC title game against Kansas City.

Thursday somebody noted to Staley that he’d now be facing fellow Flyer Gruden twice a year in the AFC West. While he praised Gruden – “he’s as good of a football coach as there is ” – he also got in a puckish tweak: “We were both quarterbacks at Dayton, but I’ll tell you that I was a little better quarterback than he was.”

The Chargers hired him because of the way they believe he’ll relate to his players and Staley was quick to give props to his mom for that:

“She was the best teacher I’ve ever seen. She had an amazing ability to listen. People just felt they could be themselves with her. She could really bring out the best in them … I think seeing that up close when I was a kid, I saw the power in that. And certainly I’ve tried to embody a lot of that now as a coach.

“So even though my mom’s not here, she’s with me.”

Once he lifted her. Now she lifts him.

Los Angeles Chargers' new coach Staley played quarterback for Mercyhurst University

By Mike Copper
Erie Times-News
January 23, 2021

Mercyhurst University football coach Marty Schaetzle likes to have his former players speak to current ones.

Schaetzle, who's run the Lakers' program since 2002, said it provides them a sense of what’s possible to achieve once their playing days are done.

Brandon Staley, a quarterback for the 2005 Lakers, was among those who talked via teleconference to members of the 2020 team last spring.

Staley did so as the then-new defensive coordinator for coach Sean McVay of the Los Angeles Rams.

“It was nice for the players to hear about the challenges Brandon was having with COVID-19, while at the same time trying to install a defense around All-Pros like (Aaron) Donald and (Jalen) Ramsey,” Schaetzle said. “I liked it because I think he realized we (Mercyhurst's coaches) were having the same sort of issues. I know our players certainly appreciated hearing him on that call.”

The Lakers didn’t know it at the time, but they were conversing with the same Brandon Staley who would go on to be hired by the Los Angeles Chargers as their new head coach last week. He'll take over SoFi Stadium's other NFL tenant as he leaves the Rams.

Schaetzle said he texted Staley, who turned 38 last month, throughout the Rams’ 2020 season, which ended with their loss at Green Bay during last weekend’s NFC divisional playoff round.

Schaetzle does hope to speak with Staley once the Perry, Ohio, native is better situated in his new job.

“This is exciting for our whole program,” Schaetzle said, “but I think the most fun for me has been to see Brandon’s former teammates being excited for him on social media. He played with a special group of athletes on the 2005 team. The seniors were part of my first (recruiting) class. They’ve all been very successful in their professions, and this is just another guy doing a great job in his profession.”

Staley takes over for Anthony Lynn, whom the Chargers fired after they missed the playoffs their past two seasons. However, they seem positioned to have a better future based on the 2020 performance of rookie quarterback Justin Herbert, who set numerous NFL rookie passing records.

Staley's background could benefit Herbert, the sixth overall pick in last year's NFL draft.

Road to Mercyhurst

Staley played for Dayton (Ohio) University, where he started at quarterback for the Division I Flyers in 2003-04. He had one season of eligibility left when he graduated and, knowing twin brother Jason also had one season left with the Mercyhurst football team, joined the roster as a graduate student.

The Lakers, then members of the former Great Lakes Intercollegiate Athletic Conference, finished 2005 at 3-7 overall. Their losing record was due in part to a rash of injuries that included starting quarterback Mitch Phillis.

Staley dutifully filled in behind center when needed. He passed for 744 yards and six touchdowns and ran for another 173 and one score.

“The greatest thing he did that year was he came in on a team with fourth-year seniors,” Schaetzle said. “They had something among themselves, but Brandon managed to fit in immediately. He understood the big picture, with some help from Jason. He amazed everybody.

“That’s when I could tell he could do very well in (the coaching) profession because he knew about relationships.”

Illness and adversity

Staley has gone from backup quarterback at a Division II program to NFL head coach before the age of 40.

While Staley's ascension was relatively swift, it wasn’t without personal adversity.

Cancer has been an ominous presence throughout most of Staley's life. His mother, Linda, died from breast cancer in 2004 and his father, Bruce, recently recovered from prostate cancer.

Brandon Staley also is a cancer survivor. He was a graduate assistant at Northern Illinois in 2006, the year after he played for Mercyhurst, when he was diagnosed with Hodgkin’s lymphoma.

Staley discussed his family’s plight during the Chargers' news conference Thursday.

“When I went through my own cancer journey, six months of radiation, I looked at it as a chance to compete,” he said. “I thought it was a chance that could really bring out all the best in me. I think when you get to the other side of it, there’s an energy. There’s a strength. There’s a feeling that you can do anything that you dream of, and that’s what I’ve been trying to do.”

Staley’s initiative saw him rise from Division III assistant to NFL head coach in five years. He was the defensive coordinator for Ohio’s John Carroll University when he was hired to coach the outside linebackers for the 2017 Chicago Bears.

Staley held that same position with the 2019 Denver Broncos. Despite the small coaching sample size, McVay heard enough talk and saw enough game video to hire him as the Rams' defensive coordinator for this past season.

Under Staley's guidance, the Rams led the NFL in total defense, passing defense and scoring defense.

Now, it’s Staley who will do the hiring and fill out a staff for the 2021 Chargers.

Switching sides

Schaetzle said it’s not as unusual as it sounds for someone who competed on one side of the ball as a player to excel at coaching on the other.

That Staley was a quarterback but made his rise through coaching ranks mostly on defense more plausible.

“There are certain positions in other sports, be it a point guard (in basketball) or a catcher (in baseball), where you need to understand the game as much as possible to be successful,” Schaetzle said. “Playing quarterback all those years, Brandon probably built up an understanding of defenses and what gives (offenses) problems. There’s no doubt that helped him, especially in his college (coaching) career.”

As for Staley fulfilling his goal of becoming an NFL head coach, Schaetzle was unsure if that would happen.

But he also guessed, based on his one season at Mercyhurst, there were few reasons why it couldn’t.

“Brandon was doing a very good job coaching at the Division III level,” Schaetzle said, “but he made up his mind that he wanted to give coaching in the NFL a shot. Once he got in with Chicago, it didn’t surprise me that he would be successful at that level. The key is always to get that break.

"Brandon had it in him because he has such passion for the game.”

Los Angeles Chargers coach Brandon Staley makes sure to connect with QB Justin Herbert

By Shelley Smith
ESPN.com
January 21, 2021

New Los Angeles Chargers coach Brandon Staley made sure he didn't take too long to introduce himself to quarterback Justin Herbert, but priorities are priorities.

"I called him on my way back home," Staley said about who he contacted first when he learned Sunday that he would be the Chargers' head coach. "I promise I called [wife] Amy first, but then I called Justin because I wanted him to hear my voice. And I wanted him to know about my family ... and then I just wanted to listen for a little bit. Wanted him to hear my energy, maybe see a little bit of vision of what I have for what we want to get accomplished together."

The 38-year-old Staley said he FaceTimed with Herbert on the way to the Costa Mesa facility Thursday for the introductory news conference "because I wanted him to see us before our big day."

Staley was the coordinator for the Los Angeles Rams' top-ranked defense. And while he wouldn't go into specifics as to what he's looking for in an offensive coordinator or offensive scheme, the former college quarterback has an understanding of what it takes on both sides of the ball.

"I'm looking for somebody with character and capacity and that can lead our staff and be part of our vision for how to get the best out of our players."

Staley did say he would be making the defensive calls and hopes to have a staff in place "in a few weeks."

Chargers general manager Tom Telesco was asked why he hired a guy with so little NFL coaching experience, including zero on the offensive side.

"Having his background, coming up in high school and college on offense. I think that helps," Telesco said. "I'm watching the Baltimore and Buffalo playoff game and one coach [Sean McDermott] had a defensive background and the other [John Harbaugh] had a special-teams background. And they both have young quarterbacks and they're both doing very well.

"There are different ways to do this," said Telesco, adding that Staley's brain is "very sharp."

Chargers' new coach Staley looking to connect with Herbert

By Joe Reedy
Associated Press
January 21, 2021

COSTA MESA, Calif. — Brandon Staley's first phone call after he accepted the Los Angeles Chargers head coaching job Sunday was to his wife, Amy. His second was to franchise quarterback Justin Herbert.

On Thursday, right before he was formally introduced as the 17th head coach in franchise history, Staley and his family video chatted with Herbert.

"You have to earn the players' trust and there's not a bigger person whose trust we need to earn than Justin's," Staley said.

The 38-year old Staley becomes a head coach after one season as the Los Angeles Rams defensive coordinator and only four years as an NFL assistant. He also fills what was considered by many to be the most attractive of the seven head coaching openings this offseason. There is plenty of talent on both sides of the ball, including Herbert, who is favored to win AP Offensive Rookie of the Year honors.

Staley replaces Anthony Lynn, who was fired on Jan. 4, two years after the Chargers reached the AFC's divisional round. Los Angeles posted two straight losing years, including 7-9 this past season.

It is also not lost on Staley that his rapid rise from being a defensive coordinator at Division III John Carroll to leading an NFL franchise in five years is a surprise.

"It doesn't make sense to a lot of people. I know that, but every day that I was coaching at John Carroll, James Madison, Hutchinson Junior College, I was envisioning going against Tom Brady or Aaron Rodgers or Russell Wilson," he said. "I was studying the NFL and trying to become as good as I could be to compete in this league, because that was always a dream of mine, and I think that those experiences have uniquely shaped me."

General manager Tom Telesco said that even though Staley might be lighter compared to others in NFL experience, his strength in other areas more than made up for it. Even though Staley has coached defense for 15 years, including 11 in college, he did play quarterback at the University of Dayton.

Telesco also said the one quality that stands out about Staley is his maturity.

"There were no buzzwords, no platitudes. It was just very to the point. A lot of substance was answered, so that really stood out," Telesco said. "You would also like to have a high level teacher and communicator. You're seeing the communication part right now. You'll see the teacher part more and when we get on the grass."

Telesco added that Staley's staff might include an assistant with head coaching experience to help in the transition.

When it comes to Staley's on-field vision, he is looking to create an offense that plays to Herbert's strengths. Herbert set a rookie record with 31 touchdown passes in 15 starts as well as having eight 300-yard games,

"We don't want to impose a system on him, but create one for him that uniquely shapes to his skill set because he is unlike anybody in the NFL, you know he's his own person," Staley said. "I think that my background as a player, my background as a defensive coach, I think that we'll be able to shape that in a really special way. I was so excited to convey in the interview, and the specifics of that were a real highlight for me."

Staley is also hoping to apply the same agility and flexibility to his defense. He said he will continue to call the defense despite being the head coach.

"I think that's what I wanted to express in the interview is that we want to put people in conflict," he said. "We want to use multiple groupings to take advantage of our players. We want to play with different tempos to put teams in a real bind. People talk about complimentary football, you know, that's how you do it is you have offense, defense, and the kicking game as mirror images of one another."

Staley is the third assistant under Rams coach Sean McVay to get an NFL head coaching job, joining Green Bay's Matt LaFleur and Cincinnati's Zac Taylor.

He was one of six candidates to interview. The Chargers also interviewed offensive coordinators Brian Daboll (Buffalo), Eric Bieniemy (Kansas City), Jason Garrett (New York Giants) and Joe Brady (Carolina), as well as Indianapolis defensive coordinator Matt Eberflus.

Telesco and Staley are hoping to fill the coaching staff within the next couple weeks. Staley was hoping to interview Rams offensive coordinator/quarterbacks coach Kevin O'Connell, but the request was blocked because it is considered a lateral move. Pep Hamilton was the Chargers quarterbacks coach this past season and has been in the running for offensive coordinator openings throughout the league.

Brandon Staley, Chargers coach? Those who know him know why he 'skyrocketed' to top

By Jeff Miller
Los Angeles Times
January 18, 2021

To understand how quickly Brandon Staley reached the status of Chargers coach, consider this:

The team has been in Los Angeles longer than he has been in the NFL.

Staley joins the Chargers after only four years in the league and one season as a coordinator. He coached outside linebackers in Chicago and Denver before overseeing the Rams' No. 1-ranked defense this season under Sean McVay.

"I knew that he could be a D-coordinator," said cornerback Chris Harris Jr., who played in Denver until joining the Chargers this season. "I knew that he should be a D-coordinator. But just to see how fast he's skyrocketed, I mean, that's pretty amazing."

Harris spent nine years with the Broncos, including 2019 when Staley was on Denver's staff. He praised Staley's football knowledge, willingness to listen to players and ability to build relationships. He predicted that teammates will love their new coach and called the situation "a great fit."

"I'm so happy, so excited for him," Harris said. "He's a guy who's very smart, knows the game of football. He took it to another level this year with the Rams. I'm excited to see what he can do with us."

Harris said he and Staley already have spoken, their discussion even going into detail about expected defensive scheme changes. With the Rams, Staley ran a 3-4 as opposed to the 4-3 the Chargers have been employing.

This is the first head coaching job at any level for Staley, 38, who spent 11 years as a college assistant before going to work for the Chicago Bears in February 2017. Six weeks earlier, the Chargers had relocated from San Diego.

During his first season as coach of the Rams, McVay was seven years younger than Staley is today. But by that point, McVay had been in the NFL as an assistant for eight years.

The man who gave Staley his first coaching job said he knew "from the word go" that Staley would be a success. But Joe Novak said no one on that 2006 Northern Illinois staff could have envisioned Staley becoming an NFL coach just 15 years later.

Even less likely, Staley's stops en route to the Chargers were rooted in anything but Power Five football conferences. Among other places, he worked at a Division III school in Minnesota and a community college in Kansas.

Staley established himself as a defensive coordinator with one season at James Madison, a Football Championship Subdivision school, and three at John Carroll, another Division III university.

"I knew he could be good," said Novak, who is retired. "I thought he had all the traits you're looking for. But to go from John Carroll to the Chargers in five years is pretty darn hard to do. I don't think you'll find anybody else who did that."

John Carroll is the school where Chargers general manager Tom Telesco played in the 1990s. Telesco and the Chargers selected Staley from a group of candidates with much more NFL experience, mostly as coordinators. The team also interviewed Jason Garrett, who spent 9½ years as Dallas' coach.

In the end, the Chargers opted for the choice they must believe has more of an NFL future than an NFL past.

The move to hire Staley on Sunday night was met with surprise around the league, in part because Buffalo offensive coordinator Brian Daboll was believed to be a favorite for the position, but also given Staley's relative inexperience. He was a candidate for the openings that remain in Philadelphia and Houston but instead landed a job considered to be one of the most attractive of this hiring cycle.

Staley spent his first three seasons in coaching as a graduate assistant working with the Northern Illinois defense. As a player, he was a quarterback, first at Dayton and then at Division II Mercyhurst University in Pennsylvania.

That combination of knowledge on both sides of the ball is expected to be vital for Staley as he moves into the unfamiliar position of overseeing an entire team.

"He's going to be so easy to work with," Novak said. "The players will love him. And he can coach too. That's a nice combination. He knew back at NIU where he was headed. You don't always find that in people that age."

With the Rams, Staley was armed with All-Pros in lineman Aaron Donald and cornerback Jalen Ramsey. His defense finished first in the NFL in points and yards allowed.

Harris explained that the more impressive thing Staley did this season could be seen in the performances of the other Rams, those defenders who emerged unexpectedly.

"They have a lot of talent over there," Harris said. "You know what you're going to get out of Ramsey and Donald. But you have a lot of no-name players, guys that you've never even heard of, who made a lot of plays on that team too."

Staley is scheduled to meet with the media Thursday for the first time since accepting the job. Along with reaching out to his new players, he is assembling his staff, one that could include current offensive coordinator Shane Steichen, though no announcement has been made.

Multiple reports Monday indicated Staley would be hiring Las Vegas' Frank Smith to be his run game coordinator. Smith has been the tight ends coach for the Raiders the last three years.

Novak said Staley's lack of ego will allow him to bring in assistants who can best supplement his skill-set. He said Staley's personality and energy will be infectious and effective.

"You spend a half-hour with him and you'll know what I'm talking about," Novak said. "You just know. With that kid — he's still a kid to me — you just know. He's got all the qualities."

Chargers head coach Brandon Staley is still in his heart a Perry Pirate

By Jeff Shudel
The News-Herald (Willoughby, Ohio)
June 16, 2021

Get out the welcome banners; Brandon Staley is headed home for the first time in two years.

Staley's feet and head are in California as the first-year head coach of the Los Angeles Chargers. His heart is where it has always been — Perry, Ohio.

Staley, a graduate of Perry High School and the University Dayton, exudes enthusiasm when he is in front of his players and when he is in front of the media, as he was on Zoom June 16 when the Chargers wrapped up their mandatory minicamp.

Most of the questions directed to Staley were from beat writers covering the Chargers, but the 38-year-old former John Carroll defensive coordinator also took time to talk about his roots and the influence the late Bob Ritley had on him as the Perry head coach. Staley played quarterback for the Pirates.

"Coach Ritley was a special, special man," Staley said. "I don't think I ever met a player, a teacher, a coach or someone that had contact with him that didn't revere him.

"When you were in the presence of him you felt different. You felt special. He had that special way about him. He got the essence of football. He got the essence of teaching. I think that's why we all loved playing for him so much. He had the same staff for over 20 years."

The more Staley talked about the Perry days, the more excited he became.

"All of us that were fortunate enough to go to school there, we all played for the same coaches. We had a lot of stability, a lot of continuity growing up.

"Certainly, I was able to see what a head coach should look like — a leader. A person that not only was a great football coach, but the type of leader and connector within the community. He could have a conversation with anybody and you would feel better about yourself.

"Certainly, I miss him. I've been able to keep in contact with his wife and son Tim, who was a heck of a player growing up. He played at the University of Akron.

"There's nothing like home. That place means a lot to me. I'm actually going back there for the first time in two years in a couple days. Coach Ritley meant an awful lot to me."

Staley has not stayed in one place long since his coaching career began in 2006 as a graduate assistant at Northern Illinois. He made stops at St. Thomas in 2009 (defensive line coach/special teams coach), Hutchinson in 2010-11 (associate head coach/defensive coordinator), Tennessee in 2012 (graduate assistant) John Carroll in 2013 (defensive coordinator/secondary coach), James Madison in 2014 (defensive coordinator/linebackers coach) and then back to John Carroll in 2015-16 as defensive coordinator/secondary coach to end his college coaching gigs.

Staley coached the Bears outside linebackers in 2017-18 and the Broncos outside linebackers in 2019.

It was impossible for Chargers general manager Tom Telesco (a John Carroll graduate) to not take notice, considering in 2020 Staley was defensive coordinator of the Los Angeles Rams, who finished with the top-rated defense last season.

"He's a genius," Rams cornerback Jalem Ramsey told Sports Illustrated when the Chargers hired Staley. "He's smart. He knows how to use his players, and works well to put his players in position to make plays or have impact on the game.

"He knows how to get the best out of people. He knows how to calm people down and keep us going throughout the games. I just think he's great. There's literally nothing negative I can say about him. I think he would be an amazing head coach."

The second stint with John Carroll was the launching point for the success that followed, Staley said on the Zoom call. The 2016 team beat Baldwin-Wallace, 17-10, in a defensive struggle in the second game of the season. The Blue Streaks went on to beat powerhouse Mount Union and then won three games in the Division III playoffs before bowing out in a national semifinal at Wisconsin-Oshkosh, 10-3.

"Anybody that knows me knows John Carroll is the place that really shaped me," Staley said. "I think that's where I discovered myself as a leader and a coach. I kind of hit a sweet spot there.

"The people at John Carroll — that place — the players, the coaches, the administration, the professors — that campus community meant a lot to my wife and me. Those players are a big reason why I'm here today. There are too many to name, but that experience with (then John Carroll head coach) Tom Arth was one of those really impactful experiences for me. That's where I really found my rhythm as a coach.

"That team we had in 2016 was the best team in school history. It's one of the best defenses I've ever been a part of. That whole process started in 2013. The 2016 team was the end of the run we had. It's such an example of what you can do when you have special people in place."

If all goes well with the Chargers, Staley's nomadic life as a football coach is at an end.

JOE LOMBARDI

Chargers offensive coordinator Joe Lombardi believes the wait was worth it

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
August 7, 2021

COSTA MESA — Chargers offensive coordinator Joe Lombardi has noticed the close friendship between quarterbacks Justin Herbert and Chase Daniel and compared them to the 1988 comedy film "Twins."

Herbert and Daniel are an odd pairing visually because Herbert is six inches taller, but they complement each other as quarterbacks, according to Lombardi.

It's a perfect pairing between an emerging starting quarterback and a vastly experienced backup.

"You know, it's really like having another coach in the room," Lombardi said about Daniel, a 13-year veteran. "It kind of looks like Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito in 'Twins' when they're standing next to each other, but it's great having them."

The quarterbacks are one of many reasons why Lombardi decided to join the Chargers this year as the offensive coordinator.

Lombardi waited five years before returning as a play caller because he wanted the perfect situation to redeem himself after a short stint as the Detroit Lions' offensive coordinator in 2014 and 2015.

With a star quarterback in Herbert, a revamped offensive line with an All-Pro center in Corey Linsley and an abundance of playmakers with wide receiver Keenan Allen and running back Austin Ekeler, the Chargers qualified as a perfect situation for Lombardi from a personnel standpoint, but it was his close relationship with Chargers coach Brandon Staley that got him to leave New Orleans after five years as their quarterbacks coach.

Lombardi coached Staley in college when Staley was the quarterback for Mercyhurst University in 2005.

"I really enjoyed my time in New Orleans and was happy there, but you know, my history with Brandon and this organization, I was real excited for the opportunity," Lombardi said. "I've got a lot of experience with (Chargers offensive line coach) Frank Smith from our time in New Orleans. So it's been very seamless, and it's a good group."

Lombardi was familiar with the Chargers' roster after the Saints' scrimmages against the Chargers in Costa Mesa between 2017 to 2019. He got a close look at Allen, who's regarded as one of the best route runners in the NFL.

"As advertised," Lombardi said about working with Allen. "There's not better. He's just always open, just one of those guys. Even when you look at the script and you look at the defense versus the route, and you think, 'Oh, they'll probably have him covered,' but they don't necessarily. He's just a fun guy to be around. He's always positive and has good energy. It's been great."

Allen compared Lombardi's offense to what former Chargers offensive coordinator Ken Whisenhunt ran with quarterback Philip Rivers. He said it's an elevated version of the West Coast offense, one that will allow him to play more freely.

"Just a step up where I'm allowed to play free and play my game," Allen said. "The fact that I was in that offense and with Phil for so long, I'm able to translate it into this offense."

Lombardi said his new offensive system will be a blend from what he ran with the Saints for many years, but with heavy input from Staley, Smith and quarterbacks coach Shane Day.

Lombardi said it didn't work in Detroit with quarterback Matthew Stafford and wide receiver Calvin Johnson because he was focused on replicating Sean Payton's system with the Saints.

With another opportunity to call plays, Lombardi is allowing his perfect situation to have plenty of say in building the Chargers' offense.

New Chargers coordinator Joe Lombardi looks to build offense around Justin Herbert

By Jeff Miller
Los Angeles Times
January 26, 2021

His first shot as an NFL offensive coordinator lasted 23 games.

Joe Lombardi now has a second chance and plans to apply a lesson learned in 2014-15.

"Just having the flexibility to adjust a little bit better maybe than we did back then," he said Tuesday in a videoconference. "That's the biggest thing, just the flexibility to adjust as things aren't like you're used to them being."

Lombardi, 49, was hired this week by new coach Brandon Staley to oversee a Chargers offense that features one of the NFL's bright young quarterbacks in Justin Herbert.

Seven years ago, he joined Jim Caldwell's staff in Detroit for a tenure that turned out to be rocky and failed to meet expectations. Lombardi was fired seven games into the 2015 season.

He had spent the previous seven years with New Orleans, first as an offensive assistant and then as quarterbacks coach. Lombardi suggested Tuesday that he had become too rutted in the Saints' way of operating.

His two Lions teams had a difficult time running the ball and in pass protection, which led to Matthew Stafford struggling despite the presence of receivers Calvin Johnson and Golden Tate.

After being dismissed by Caldwell, Lombardi returned to New Orleans, where he spent five more seasons as quarterbacks coach before the Chargers called.

Now, he's in a position where, like Staley last week, he's touting the idea of building a scheme around Herbert rather than forcing the quarterback into a predetermined system.

"I'm comfortable with whatever our guys are good at," Lombardi said. "Man, if it's something the quarterback thrives in, then that's what we're going to want to do."

For Herbert, Lombardi explained that could mean more up-tempo and no-huddle next season. The Chargers tried both this season but with no sustained commitment.

In college, Herbert flourished in an offense that never huddled and operated almost exclusively from the shotgun. Lombardi said he will go back to Herbert's days at Oregon to tap into what the 22-year-old does best.

"He's got a skill set that is elite," Lombardi said. "It appears there's nothing he can't do. He's got an incredibly strong arm, good accuracy. He's very athletic. Sounds like he's a real smart guy that's a good leader."

Along with directing the Chargers' offense, Lombardi is expected to continue developing Herbert after a season that made him the favorite for the NFL's offensive rookie of the year award.

Having spent 12 of the previous 14 years working with Drew Brees, Lombardi said the future Hall of Famer's commitment to detail and exhaustive preparation are two qualities be can pass along to Herbert.

He said that in New Orleans, Brees' influence could be seen in the Saints' other quarterbacks, specifically how they followed his example. He called Brees' traits "coachable."

Lombardi's familiarity with Herbert dates to preparation for last year's draft. He said he began paying closer attention during the season as Herbert gained league-wide exposure by the week.

The Chargers lost to Saints in mid-October, 30-27, in overtime. Herbert finished 20 for 34 for 264 yards and four touchdowns, an effort Lombardi noticed even as he was more focused on Brees.

"I've seen enough to know I've got no questions about his abilities," Lombardi said. "If you lined up all the quarterback skill sets in the NFL, he'd be at the very top with a couple guys."

After a season in which the Chargers offense on occasion lacked aggressiveness, Lombardi said that although game situations sometimes dictate otherwise, he leans toward leaving the offense on the field if there's an opportunity.

"I always say, 'What would I want if I'm on the other sidelines?' " Lombardi said. "I always feel like when a team's going for it on fourth down [it's] like, 'I wish they were just punting it.' So, yeah, I'm a big fan of going for it on fourth down."

Lombardi said he was drawn to the Chargers' job mostly because of his relationship with Staley. In 2005, both were at Mercyhurst University, Lombardi as offensive coordinator and Staley as quarterback.

He also said he is not surprised Staley received a head coaching job after only four seasons in the NFL. Lombardi recalled a conversation the two had a few years ago about Staley making it to the league as a coach.

"I said, 'Look, you'll get your chance, and I bet you you'll be a head coach in five years,' " Lombardi said, smiling. "Pretty sure I called that one a long time ago."

Chargers' Joe Lombardi eager to build an offense around Justin Herbert

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
January 26, 2021

Brandon Staley observed from the back of the room while Joe Lombardi instructed the New Orleans Saints' quarterbacks, including Drew Brees.

Nearly 12 years before Staley asked Lombardi to be his offensive coordinator with the Chargers, Lombardi invited his former quarterback turned coach to a training camp visit as the Saints embarked on their Super Bowl season of 2009.

"I'd bet you that he's watched every single game we've played on offense here in New Orleans since then," Lombardi said Tuesday about Staley, who at the time coached defensive linemen and special teams at St. Thomas, a Division III program in Minnesota. "Just (Staley's) familiarity with me and what we've done here (in New Orleans), it makes it such an easier transition."

If Lombardi's guess about the recently-hired Chargers head coach is true, then Staley has watched more than 160 Saints games from the past decade.

On Monday, Staley hired Lombardi as the Chargers' new offensive coordinator. Lombardi spent 12 seasons on Sean Payton's coaching staff during two stints in New Orleans — 10 overall as the quarterbacks coach, including the past five seasons.

Lombardi, 49, said he had interest in other coaching jobs since the Detroit Lions fired him as the offensive coordinator in 2015, but he wasn't going to jump at any opportunity. It needed to make sense and familiarity was important to him.

Staley, 38, was Lombardi's quarterback for one season at Mercyhurst University in 2005, when Lombardi was the offensive coordinator.

"Brandon, No. 1," Lombardi said when asked why the Chargers' opening was the right fit. "How well I know him and I think how well he knows me. … Not to mean that we're going to copy (the Saints' offense), but just coming from a common background of football, to be able to get things started. As he is in the beginning of putting a staff together, what he is looking for, it all lines up with the way that I think.

"Sean Payton often says that he is more interested in compatibility first before he thinks about capability. I just think that the compatibility of what Brandon is building here is going to be second-to-none."

Lombardi will likely incorporate some parts of the Saints' offense to form the right scheme for quarterback Justin Herbert and the rest of the Chargers' offense, but he knows the importance of flexibility.

Lombardi said a reason why his stint with the Lions didn't work out was because he forced the Saints' offensive system instead of using it as a starting point to build off players' strengths. The Lions finished 11-5 during Lombardi's first season in 2014, but the offense based on short passes, timing and precision produced mixed results for quarterback Matthew Stafford and a Lions team that ranked 19th in total offense. It got worse the following season and the Lions fired Lombardi after a 1-6 start.

"The biggest thing is just being able to be more flexible," Lombardi said about what he learned the most as a first-time play caller in Detroit. "Spending so much time in New Orleans and doing things one way, you kind of get used to that. When you're put into a new situation where the schedule is different, and maybe you're around coaches that weren't used to doing things the way that you were used to, just having flexibility to adjust a little bit better maybe than we did back then.

"That's the biggest thing, just the flexibility to adjust when things aren't the way that you're used to them being."

Staley has only coached in the NFL for four seasons, but he's had plenty of success by prioritizing players' strengths over schemes. Lombardi said he is eager to form an offensive coaching staff with Staley.

Lombardi wants coaches from other offensive schemes to provide different perspectives, which will be vital for Herbert's development after a dynamic rookie season.

"He's got a skill set that's elite," Lombardi said about Herbert. "It appears there's nothing that he can't do. He's got an incredibly strong arm, good accuracy and he's very athletic. Sounds like he's a real smart guy that's a good leader. He just checks all the boxes."

Lombardi said it's too soon to reveal what the Chargers' offense will look like in 2021, but he said Staley wants tempo.

With Herbert's downfield accuracy, and Staley looking to play off his quarterbacks' strengths, Lombardi will likely call many deep shots, but he understands what type of weapons Herbert has.

Wide receiver Keenan Allen, running back Austin Ekeler and tight end Hunter Henry thrive with up-tempo passes, a staple of the Saints' offense since Payton took over in 2006. The Chargers' trio had a similar style with quarterback Philip Rivers before Herbert took over in 2020.

Allen had an instant connection with Herbert, but Henry and Ekeler, one of the best pass-catching running backs in the NFL, often got lost when the rookie quarterback was looking upfield for wide receivers Mike Williams, Jalen Guyton and Tyron Johnson.

It will be up to Lombardi and Staley to find the right balance to utilize all of the Chargers' skill players.

Lombardi has shown he's able to evolve around his Saints quarterbacks in recent years. He's worked with quick passers Brees and Teddy Bridgewater, aggressive quarterback Jameis Winston and athletic quarterback Taysom Hill. Watching how Payton changed the Saints' offense from Brees as the focal point to wide receiver Michael Thomas and running back Alvin Kamara as the centerpieces, will likely help Lombardi in his second opportunity as an offensive coordinator.

Lombardi said it's important to have a balanced offense, which scared some Chargers fans on social media, but he reiterated the importance of using Herbert's strengths as a passer.

"I think it's important to have some balance," Lombardi said. "But when you have a quarterback as talented as Justin, you want to let him throw the ball when it's appropriate. That's for sure."

Herbert had a historic rookie season under prior head coach Anthony Lynn, but the coaching staff was often criticized for conservative play calling and not taking enough chances on fourth down. Lombardi wasn't as cautious in his response when asked about possibly going for it more on fourth downs.

"I'm a big fan of going for it on fourth down," Lombardi said. "I know all the data analysis says that we are probably not aggressive enough as NFL coaches. I'm in favor of moving in that direction."

Chargers' Lombardi hoping to make most of second chance

By Joe Reedy
Associated Press
January 26, 2021

COSTA MESA, Calif. (AP) — Joe Lombardi is hoping that his second stint as an offensive coordinator goes better than the first.

Lombardi, who accepted the Los Angeles Chargers coordinator opening over the weekend, said on Tuesday the biggest thing he learned from his first opportunity in Detroit was that he needs to be more flexible when assessing his personnel and their abilities. Lombardi went to the Lions in 2015, but was fired seven games into the following season.

"Spending so much time in New Orleans and doing things one way, you kind of get used to that," he said. "When you're put into a new situation where the schedule is different, and maybe you're around coaches that weren't used to doing things the way that you were used to, just having to flexibility to adjust a little bit better, maybe, than we did back then."

Lombardi comes to Los Angeles after a second stint in New Orleans, where he was the quarterbacks coach for five seasons. Twelve of his 14 seasons as an NFL assistant have been with the Saints.

Chargers head coach Brandon Staley and Lombardi have worked together before, but in a player-coach capacity. Lombardi was the offensive coordinator and quarterbacks coach at Mercyhurst College in 2005, when Staley transferred from Dayton to play with his twin brother, Jason.

Staley, who was hired as coach on Jan. 17, said Lombardi's experience with the Saints should prove invaluable.

"You think about the relationship he has with Drew Brees and having a front-row seat to that relationship. It's huge," Staley said. "And then obviously partnering up with Sean Payton — one of the best offensive coaches in the NFL, really one of the best coaches period — that experience is invaluable."

Lombardi said the biggest thing he gained from Brees is being exact on details and that other things, such as how to communicate with the receivers, is coachable.

The first task for Lombardi will be trying to create a system that further showcases quarterback Justin Herbert, who passed for 4,336 yards and a rookie-record 31 touchdowns this past season.

Lombardi said he hasn't spoken to Herbert yet, but that he has reached out to him after finally getting his number. Lombardi scouted Herbert leading up to last year's draft and had a chance to see him in person when the Chargers faced the Saints.

"I've seen enough to know that I have no questions about his abilities," said Lombardi about Herbert. "I mean, if you lined up all the quarterback skillsets in the NFL, he'd be at the very top, with couple of guys. Like I said, the sky's the limit with what he's able to do."

In discussions with Staley, Lombardi said they are looking to have an up-tempo offense. The Chargers were ranked ninth in the league in total offense, including sixth in passing. While they have a solid array of skill position players — including running back Austin Ekeler along with wide receivers Keenan Allen and Mike Williams — the Chargers have struggled to build an offensive line and have lacked depth because of key injuries.

"Look, I'm comfortable with whatever our guys are good at. If it's something that the quarterback thrives in, that's what we're going to want to do," Lombardi said.

RENALDO HILL

Chargers' new defense leader Renaldo Hill is well-coordinated with Brandon Staley

By Jeff Miller
Los Angeles Times
January 27, 2021

They spent the 2019 season together in Denver, as in really together.

Renaldo Hill explained that his office was next to Brandon Staley's, and the two frequently swapped ideas.

"I think we probably spent more time in the other person's office just talking and game-planning than our own," Hill said Wednesday. "It was important to us."

They now are teaming up again, Staley as the Chargers' new head coach and Hill as his defensive coordinator.

Barely a year ago, they were position coaches for the Broncos. Staley worked with the outside linebackers and Hill the defensive backs. Neither has been in the NFL long, Staley only four seasons and Hill three.

But in 2021, they will combine efforts to oversee a defense led by Joey Bosa up front and Derwin James everywhere else.

Staley, who was hired away from the Rams after one year as their defensive coordinator, will call defensive plays during games while Hill manages the operation.

"We'll collaborate," Hill said. "[Staley has] always been open to listening and receiving. I'm looking forward to the opportunity. But, in the meantime, I definitely will lean on Staley and be able to sit back and learn."

The setup is similar to what they experienced in Denver, where head coach Vic Fangio has called the defense the last two years with Ed Donatell serving as coordinator.

The Chargers will be switching to a hybrid 3-4 scheme that is expected to present various fronts, often employs more defensive backs and emphasizes versatility.

"We want to uniquely shape it around our guys," Staley explained last week. "I think that's probably the hallmark of the way we play, that agility that we have to feature our premium players."

Under former coordinator Gus Bradley, the Chargers blitzed as little as any team. Though they are expected to bring extra pressure more in 2021, the Chargers don't figure to be blitz heavy.

Staley and the Rams ranked 19th in blitz percentage this season. Using a similar 3-4 system under Fangio, Denver finished in the bottom half of the NFL in blitzing in 2019-20.

Hill, 42, was drafted in the seventh round by Arizona in 2001 and had a decade-long career. His playing days ended when the Broncos cut him in late July 2011. During that summer, he met Chris Harris, an undrafted rookie cornerback the Broncos had signed out of Kansas. Harris was with Denver for nine years and now is entering his second season with the Chargers.

"I heard about some of the noise, that this young guy was flashing, making plays all over the field," Hill recalled, smiling. "And, you know, 10 years down the road he's still doing the same thing."

Hill's coaching tenure began in 2012 as a graduate assistant at Wyoming. Two years later, he was out of coaching and spent time visiting various college programs. He said he went to his alma mater, Michigan State, as well as Alabama, Utah and North Dakota State.

"I just wanted to continue to build while I was out of the game," Hill said. "I was always trying to find out how I could advance and move forward."

He got a job coaching defensive backs at the University of Pittsburgh in 2015 and spent three years there before reaching the NFL as an assistant with Miami. Hill was with the Broncos the last two seasons.

Now, he's a coordinator entering just his fourth year in the league and with a team that is transitioning to a new staff but has enough promise to be considered beyond rebuilding.

"It may have been a fast move up, but I felt like I was preparing myself," Hill said. "You have to say there was some luck there. But I'm thankful for every opportunity I've been in."

Though the Chargers have announced nothing officially, Hill indicated that Giff Smith, who has coached the team's defensive line the last five years, will remain on staff.

He also said Derrick Ansley and Tom Donatell will be joining the Chargers. Ansley had been the defensive coordinator at the University of Tennessee and Donatell, an ex-UCLA assistant, a quality control coach for Seattle.

The Chargers also have hired defensive line coach Jay Rodgers and Joe Barry, who is expected to be the defensive run game coordinator.

New Chargers DC Renaldo Hill excited to reunite with Brandon Staley

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
January 27, 2021

Brandon Staley and Renaldo Hill spent countless hours in each other's offices as defensive coaches on the Denver Broncos' staff to not only prepare for their 2019 opponents but for future offensive schemes they might face.

Planning ahead is why Staley, the recently hired Chargers head coach, decided to hire Hill as his defensive coordinator.

"Let's figure out some puzzles," Hill recalled Wednesday about his game-planning hours with Staley. "Let's find the new things that people are doing and let's attack them … We're always looking for the next thing. How can we improve our defense?"

The two became close during their lone season together in Denver, with Staley as the outside linebackers coach and Hill as the defensive backs coach.

Hill remained in the same role with the Broncos this past season and Staley went on to be the Rams' defensive coordinator.

Now they'll reunite to use their past notes and brainstorm for the Chargers.

Staley will call the plays for the defense, but Hill said the new job intrigued him because he knows Staley will allow his heavy input on game days.

"I'm going to lean on (Staley) earlier in this process," said Hill, a first-time defensive coordinator.

"But I know he's always open to listen to ideas. And he has his own ideas, I have mine. But as a defensive staff, we'll definitely collaborate on all those and come up with the best for the guys, but he's always been open to listening and receiving. A lot of times you may be in rooms and it might not be received as well."

Hill, 42, played 10 NFL seasons as safety for the Arizona Cardinals, then-Oakland Raiders, Miami Dolphins and Broncos. He coached for college programs Wyoming and Pittsburgh before landing his first NFL coaching job with the Dolphins in 2018 as an assistant defensive backs coach.

Hill said Tampa Bay Buccaneers defensive coordinator Todd Bowles inspired him to become a coach when Bowles coached him with the Dolphins in 2008.

"The way his brain operated, that's something that I think we have a shared common," Hill said about Bowles.

"Always thinking from a different lens. He always talked to me about, 'You know this game. There will be a lot of people with a lot of experience.' It's good to pick up that experience from him and understand that they have something to offer, but don't sell yourself short on the things you know about this game as well."

Staley also noticed that potential in Hill, and referred to him as a "young superstar," according to Hill during the recruiting pitch.

Hill said this opportunity will help him learn how to coach defensive linemen and linebackers while still sharing his extensive knowledge to the Chargers' defensive backs.

Eventually, Hill wants to use this experience for bigger coaching roles and he believes Staley will allow him to grow as a coach with the Chargers.

"That's one of the first things that Staley mentioned is about putting guys in better positions in order to move up and advance," said Hill, a Black coach, when discussing the NFL's lack of diversity among coaches. "It just wasn't lip service.

"(Staley is) always talking with his staff about putting guys in position to move up, and I know that's something, once I step in that building, that'd be the game plan for not only myself but the rest of the staff."

Hill didn't get into specifics about how the Chargers will look defensively in 2021, but he stressed the importance of bringing pressure and disguising coverages, possibly from a Cover-2 scheme with two safeties downfield.

The Chargers rarely blitzed in the past four seasons with Gus Bradley as defensive coordinator. Bradley often utilized a four-man rush and used Cover-3 with a single-high safety.

"You have to bring those simulated pressures," Hill said. "You have to bring those five-man pressures as well as six. Obviously, you want to be able to mix those things in, but you also want to see how your personnel fits to all those things.

"But I think it's important to understand the personnel and how we want to operate, but I believe you have to bring pressure in this league. I believe you have to change it up and give these quarterbacks multiple looks. You also have to know who you're going against, because of the quarterbacks we have in our conference, they invite pressure."

Hill was likely referring to Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes.

He's looking forward to game planning against him twice a year, along with the many other talented quarterbacks in the NFL.

Chargers' Hill eager for first shot as defensive coordinator

By Joe Reedy
Associated Press
January 27, 2021

COSTA MESA, Calif. (AP) — Renaldo Hill is getting his first opportunity to be a defensive coordinator, although he won't be thrown into the deep end of the pool just yet.

Los Angeles Chargers coach Brandon Staley will call the plays during games, allowing Hill to be able to progress at his own pace. It is a hierarchy Hill is used to. During his two seasons coaching defensive backs with the Denver Broncos, coach Vic Fangio called the plays while coordinator Ed Donatell handled things during the week.

"I definitely will lean on Staley, and be able to sit back and learn. It still gives you that that growth opportunity," Hill said Wednesday. "I can move around and assert myself into the front seven, but also still have a footprint on the back end."

The 42-year-old Hill has eight years of coaching experience after a 10-year playing career with the Cardinals, Raiders, Dolphins and Broncos.

He joined the Dolphins staff as assistant defensive backs coach in 2018 after five years at Wyoming and Pittsburgh, before being hired by the Broncos.

Hill and Staley worked together in Denver in 2019, when Staley was coaching outside linebackers.

"We'll definitely collaborate on those and come up with what's best for the guys, but he's always been open to listening and receiving ideas," Hill said. "Staley emphasizes all the time it is a collaboration of voices in the room, and everybody having their opinion in what this defense will look like. When you can listen to those other ideas, it makes everybody feel a part of what we're doing, we're having success."

Hill inherits a unit that has defensive end Joey Bosa and safety Derwin James as its cornerstones, but plenty of questions. Bosa missed four games last season due to concussions and James has played in only five games the past two seasons due to foot and knee injuries.

After four years of running a 4-3 scheme under Gus Bradley, the Chargers will go back to a 3-4 defense. Los Angeles was ranked 10th in total defense this past season, but had six games in which it squandered double-digit leads. The Chargers were also 25th in sacks and tied for 22nd in takeaways.

Hill said he is looking for the defense to have a more consistent pass rush and to better pressure the quarterback. The Chargers were last in blitzing, averaging 6.1 per game while the league average is 11.7.

Hill also revealed that defensive line coach Giff Smith is being retained, while Derrick Ansley, Joe Barry and Tom Donatell are joining the staff.

DERIUS SWINTON II

Chargers are hoping Derius Swinton II can fix disastrous special teams

By Jeff Miller
Los Angeles Times
January 28, 2021

A lot of things didn't go well for the Chargers in 2020.

Except on special teams, where pretty much nothing went well.

By every measure available, the Chargers this season got kicked in the kicking game.

"I'm not here because I'm some guru," Derius Swinton II said Thursday. "I'm here because of the relationships I've had with the players and the performances they put on the field."

Improved special teams performances in 2021 certainly would be welcomed by the Chargers and new head coach Brandon Staley, who hired Swinton to coordinate his team's third phase.

The Chargers missed too many kicks, had too many punts blocked and too frequently failed to set up the offense or defense on changes of possession.

The production was so poor that veteran coach George Stewart was removed as coordinator in late November. When that change didn't help, former head coach Anthony Lynn took over special teams to finish the season.

After Lynn was fired on Jan. 4, general manager Tom Telesco praised Stewart's efforts and admitted the kicking game failures were because of inadequate roster building.

"I didn't do a good enough job getting him the players that he needs," Telesco said. "I need to do a better job stacking that group. And I will. From top to bottom, it just wasn't nearly good enough."

Now the Chargers turn to Swinton, 35, who has spent more than a decade in the NFL and was the special teams coordinator for the 2016 San Francisco 49ers. He was an assistant with Arizona this season.

Asked to identify his philosophy in building productive special teams, Swinton referenced the "three f's of football."

"It's not going to be grammatically correct, but it sticks with the players," he explained. "We're going to play fast, physical and fundamentally sound. … My mom's an English teacher. So, phonetically, that's correct."

Michael Badgley is coming off a season in which he missed 12 kicks — nine field goals and three extra points. He was perfect from shorter distances but converted only 10 of 19 field goal tries from 40 yards or more.

Ty Long had three punts blocked and ranked 30th in net average and punts inside the 20-yard line. The Chargers surrendered the most punt return yards in the NFL.

Telesco said the poor kicking game performances contributed to the team's struggles in close outcomes. During a stretch that began in Week 2, the Chargers went 0-7 in one-possession games.

Though they ranked near the middle league-wide in kickoff returns, only four teams were less productive returning punts. They were fourth-worst in average kickoff return yards allowed.

All totaled, it's little wonder that Telesco called improving the special teams "a point of emphasis" for the upcoming offseason.

Another area where Swinton could impact the Chargers in 2021 is game management, an expectation Staley referred to in a statement released by the team Monday to announce coordinator changes.

Game management was another struggle for Lynn and his staff as the Chargers finished 7-9. There were issues with strategic decisions and communication in vital moments.

With the Cardinals this season, Swinton said he was part of a three-man team that assisted head coach Kliff Kingsbury in such matters.

While Kingsbury was busy calling offensive plays, for example, Swinton said he and two fellow staffers would plot what to do next based on game circumstances.

"I think it was that flow of communication, situationally, that led us to be one of the better teams, if you look at two-minute, four-minute and end-of-game [situations]," Swinton said. "It's just communication."

While watching the NFL's conference championship games Sunday, Swinton said he and Staley were texting back and forth about what they would do at certain crucial points.

He said Staley finally just called him so the two could talk in more depth.

"We're football nuts, I guess you could say," Swinton said. "I think the more the entire staff, coordinators, work together with the head coach, and we start seeing the game the same way, it's just going to work together. … I always said that you try to see the landmines before they blow up, you know what I mean?"

Derius Swinton wants Chargers' special teams to sizzle

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
January 28, 2021

Derius Swinton binged every snap of the Chargers' special teams in 2020 before interviewing for the team's coordinator position.

Swinton saw all the glaring mistakes that occurred for arguably the worst unit in the NFL, but that didn't make him wonder how general manager Tom Telesco would address the unit in the draft and free agency.

Swinton noticed the players the Chargers had in their "cabinet" and didn't hesitate when coach Brandon Staley offered him the job of special teams coordinator. With 10 years of special teams coaching experience for six NFL teams, Swinton had no issue with making it work with what he has. Swinton was an assistant special teams coach for the Arizona Cardinals last year.

"When building special teams, and when building a team, I think it's like making a meal," Swinton told reporters Thursday in his introductory news conference. "I don't worry about what groceries I have. I just take the groceries that I have in my cabinet and I make the meal. I don't care if I have fresh fruit, or if the fruit's a day old or a week old. As long as it's not spoiled, we can make a meal."

Swinton, a former 49ers special teams coordinator in 2016, will likely receive better ingredients for fixing the Chargers' special teams in 2021. Telesco took blame for not providing the previous coaching regime the proper special teams players and referred to the unit as a priority he plans on upgrading this offseason.

But Swinton, 35, will still have the tough task of quickly fixing special teams with many news faces and limited practice time, especially if the NFL decides to cancel the offseason program for a second consecutive year because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Would you love to have guys that are (like Patriots' special teamer) Matthew Slater, that are 12-year Pro Bowl guys, all over the place?" Swinton asked. "Yeah, but that's not the realistic view of the NFL. Your roster is going to fluctuate here and there. As a coach, you just have to give them tools to be successful. I think that's what I'm in charge to do, with whoever is on the roster.

"We have to find what they do best and put them into those situations to be successful. Age and those things, they'll vary. Selfishly, yeah, I wish I had 10 Pro Bowlers – everybody wants that, right? But, realistically, you take your groceries, whatever you're given, and you make the best meal that you can make every single week."

The Chargers overlooked special teams last season and filled the unit with inexperienced players, which led to disastrous results in most areas. The Chargers had a league-high three punts blocked, and ranked 28th with an average of 5.6 yards for punt returns.

Kicker Michael Badgley missed nine field goals, including the potential game winner versus the New Orleans Saints last season. Punter Ty Long placed only 12 punts inside the 20-yard line, which ranked 30th at the position.

The poor execution on special teams was noticeable in games versus the Miami Dolphins, when the Chargers fell behind 14-0 because of the unit's mistakes, and during the 45-0 loss to the New England Patriots, when they allowed touchdowns on a punt return and a blocked field goal.

One reason why Swinton wasn't concerned with how the front office would address special teams was because of his close relationship with Staley. The two have similar philosophies for special teams, and that stems from their one year together as assistant coaches on the Chicago Bears' staff in 2017.

Swinton said Staley attended all of his special teams meetings in Chicago. Swinton was the Bears' assistant special teams coach and Staley coaches the outside linebackers.

"When a position coach takes the time out to sit in your meeting, as a special teams coach, it shows that it means something not only to him, but to the rest of the team, to the head coach," Swinton said about Staley. "That's where that relationship started. That's where I think it'll keep growing."

Swinton got into coaching after playing college football for Hampton University. His first NFL coaching job came in 2009 with the then-St. Louis Rams as a special teams quality control coach. Swinton learned from one of the best special teams coaches in Jeff Rodgers, the assistant head coach and special teams coordinator for the Cardinals. Swinton worked with Rodgers with the Denver Broncos, Bears and Cardinals.

"Working with him and learning from him, and growing from co-worker to brother, just helped my career and my life in so many ways," Swinton said. "I'm always indebted to him, and he knows that."

If Swinton is able to fix the Chargers' sluggish special teams, he too will likely earn a reputation for being one of the best coaches in that area.

Fixing broken special teams top priority for new Los Angeles Chargers coaching staff

By Shelley Smith
ESPN.com
January 29, 2021

COSTA MESA, Calif. -- When we last checked in with the Los Angeles Chargers' special teams unit, there was a lot wrong. There were either a) too many players on the field, or not enough b) punts being blocked or fumbled c) wrong plays being called or d) coaches being changed and changed again.

Basically, anything that could go wrong did go wrong, as the Chargers were at the bottom of ESPN's FPI special teams rankings for most of the season and finished tied with the Minnesota Vikings for last in the league.

Former coach Anthony Lynn -- who took over special teams for Keith Burns (who had previously taken over for George Stewart) after a disastrous 45-0, Week 13 loss to the New England Patriots in which the Chargers gave up a punt-return and a blocked field goal touchdown -- was fired at the end of the season. The Spanos family hired former Los Angeles Rams defensive coordinator Brandon Staley, who brought in Derius Swinton as special teams coordinator to clean up the mess.

Staley has previous ties to Swinton, as both were on the Chicago Bears' coaching staff in 2017. Swinton has coached special teams for eight NFL franchises over 13 years, most recently as the Arizona Cardinals' assistant special teams coach last season.

Swinton he says he has already watched every single Chargers special teams play from this past season. And he's confident he can fix what went wrong, from on-field confusion to working with inexperienced players.

"It's a process," Swinton said Thursday. "It's first, where are we at when we do well with these guys and from there we're just going to educate them.

"I don't believe in looking backwards. You just go through a process every day, and then talk. You evaluate first, then you get with each other and they come in and you implement your system around them. The cupboard is not empty here."

Indeed. If anything the problem was miscommunication -- for example, when the field-goal unit and offense were on the field at the same time as time ran out in the first half in Week 14 against the Atlanta Falcons, costing the Chargers a chip-shot field-goal attempt.

"I can't speak for what they were doing," Swinton said. "You have relative practice, your catalog of situations. And you start talking the same language. The culture from every single person from the head coach to the kicker, maybe even the trainer. They've seen it so much they start picking up on it and then you build the community so that when you get to game day, everybody starts to see it."

Blocking and coverage breakdowns were the norm for the Chargers' special teams this past season, leading to multiple blocked punts against them. Wilfredo Lee/AP
Swinton said in Arizona that the entire team would meet and go over situations that could arise. Staley is expected to sit in on special teams meetings, showing how important he views that part of the game.

Swinton said that approach is infectious, to the point that nobody wanted to be left out of Cardinals' special teams meetings.

"It was like a party," he said. "It was a mindset. No football game in the history of football has started without a kickoff or a return. It's a big selling point. Patrick Mahomes is not starting the Super Bowl," he explained, highlighting that the game will start with a kickoff.

Swinton says he goes by three (phonetic) Fs -- Fast, Physical, and Fundamentally Sound. He said his unit will go through the same fundamental drills every day.

"It's not grammatically correct, but it stays with the players," he said.

Swinton sees himself more as a caddy than a coach.

"I recommend clubs at time," he said. "But they're the pros."

Swinton also understands attention spans, or lack thereof. He builds five-minute clips of plays, then narrates them and gives them to the players before they are expected to know them. It saves on note taking and allows him to direct players toward watching certain plays in advance. And then the next day, it's a discussion, rather than a lecture.

"They can learn a new Tik-Tok dance in 30 seconds, so you gotta catch them," he said.

And Swinton believes in a three-person, play-evaluator team to take pressure off the head coach, or whomever is calling plays. He and Staley were on the phone texting and talking all through last weekend's championship games. He can't watch a game as a fan.

"It's just not possible when you're a coach," he said.

Especially as a coach aiming to fix things.

ODAY ABOUSHI

Chargers continue to bolster offensive line with Oday Aboushi

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
March 20, 2021

Matt Feiler, the Chargers' recent free-agent acquisition, wasn't sure which offensive guard spot he'll mandate this upcoming season.

He might have a better idea Saturday morning after the Chargers announced they agreed to terms with offensive guard Oday Aboushi.

Aboushi, a nine-year veteran, agreed to a one-year, $2 million deal, according to NFL Network's Mike Garafolo. Aboushi spent the past two seasons with the Detroit Lions, where he started seven games at right guard last season.

Aboushi, who turns 30 in June, has appeared in 65 career regular-season games, including 42 starts with five NFL teams. He was drafted by the New York Jets in the fifth round of the 2013 draft.

Three of the Chargers' four free-agent acquisitions this week were interior offensive linemen, including All-Pro center Corey Linsley and Feiler. The team also agreed to terms with tight end Jared Cook.

Feiler told reporters Friday that the Chargers didn't specify which guard spot he'll play, but if the team wants consistency for their newcomers, Feiler can patrol the left side because he started 13 games there last year with the Pittsburgh Steelers.

The Chargers will likely have three new interior offensive linemen in 2021, but it's not a guarantee that Aboushi will start next to Feiler and Linsley. But the veteran from the University of Virginia will at least provide depth and versatility with starting experience at both guard spots.

The Chargers might add competition for Aboushi during next month's NFL draft, but they'll likely prioritize offensive tackle with their No. 13 overall pick. They have a vacancy at left tackle after addressing the interior of the offensive line in free agency.

Right tackle Bryan Bulaga could potentially have four new teammates on the starting offensive line. Dan Feeney, the Chargers' starting center last year, signed with the New York Jets on Friday. Left tackle Sam Tevi and left guard Forrest Lamp started for the Chargers in 2020, but they're now free agents searching for new teams.

Trai Turner, last year's starting right guard, was released this month to clear cap space.

10 Insights: Oday Aboushi Bolsters Chargers Offensive Line

By Hayley Elwood
Chargers.com
March 20, 2021

Below are 10 quick-hitting insights on new Chargers guard Oday Aboushi:

1) Aboushi is a former fifth-round pick of the New York Jets in the 2013 NFL Draft out of Virginia.

2) At Virginia he earned All-ACC honors twice in his career as a Cavalier. He earned first-team honors as a senior and second-team honors as a junior. His performance as a senior led to a Senior Bowl invite.

3) He has versatility having played both left and right guard during his time in the league.

4) Along with the Jets, he spent time with the Houston Texans, Seattle Seahawks, Arizona Cardinals, and most recently, Detroit Lions.

5) Of the 65 games he's played in the NFL, he started 42 of those contests.

6) During his time in Detroit, he started 10 games over the last two seasons. Eight of those starts came in 2020 where he started the last six games of the year. He mainly played right guard in 2020.

7) At 6-5, 308-pounds, Aboushi joins Corey Linsley and Matt Feiler as the third offensive lineman to be nabbed by the Chargers since free agency began.

8) Aboushi becomes the second Virginia Cavalier on the Bolts roster joining wide receiver Joe Reed.

9) In 2014 and 2015, Aboushi went to Sudan with the Islamic Medical Association of North America and volunteered with SaveSmile, to help repair cleft lips and palates of residents there.

10) Aboushi was born and raised in Brooklyn and attended Xaverian High School playing football for the Xaverian Clippers. Another notable Xaverian alum is comedian and SNL cast member, Pete Davidson.

JOEY BOSA

Joey Bosa enjoying learning and exploring Los Angeles Chargers' new defense

By Shelley Smith
ESPN.com
August 5, 2021

COSTA MESA, Calif. -- To see Joey Bosa move -- like, say, between the field and the (healthy) snack cart after practice -- you'd think he was more like a sloth. Slow, deliberate, slower. You'd never guess he was one of the best and fastest edge rushers in the NFL.

But put Bosa on the football field, specifically in this new defense the Los Angeles Chargers are running, and the 6-foot-5, 280-pound Bosa has cat-like reflexes, brutal off the ball and even more brutal when he makes contact, which is often -- even without pads.

That's not to say that Bosa is completely comfortable standing on the edge, rather than down with a hand in the dirt. He does both, depending on whether new coach Brandon Staley has the Chargers in a 3-4 defense or a 4-3. It's all designed to keep the opposing offense guessing and is completely unpredictable, which is how Staley likes it.

And the thought of Bosa being utilized in many different ways is a scary thought to opposing defenses.

"There's a lot going on," Bosa said. "A lot of moving pieces. Usually I'm coming in here and I'm solely focused on how I'm rushing each day, which is another dynamic. I get to judge myself on another level, and it's fun. But yeah, it's going to take some time."

But football smarts are not an issue for Bosa.

"I'm going to make a few mistakes here and there, but by the time camp is over, I'm sure it will be second nature," he said.

On one sequence, Bosa took on rookie offensive tackle Rashawn Slater, who has been praised by just about everyone in camp. Slater was a first-round draft pick for a reason, a player who got the best of defending rookie defensive player of the year Chase Young (then at Ohio State) during his junior year at Northwestern -- setting up a great Week 1 matchup between Slater and Young when the Chargers head to Washington.

But back to Bosa and his gait ... the quick, game-time one. He faced Slater, who slowed him initially and held up until the whistle blew to end the rep. But if the whistle had blown just a little bit later, who knows if the rook would have held up.

"I turn into a different guy when I get mad," Bosa has said many times.

Bosa isn't the only player who loves the new scheme.

"It's refreshing," said defensive lineman Justin Jones. "It allows a team the inability to adjust to what we're going. It keeps them on their toes, which means offensive linemen are on their toes. They're not going to know who's blitzing -- who's coming and who's not coming.

"It's going to be hard to figure us out (for the opponents). What we're doing, what we're bringing. We're never a standstill defense and that's going to make us really hard to beat."

That suits Bosa just fine, even if it means learning a new scheme and a new stance. But Bosa admits they're not easy to learn, which he's fine with.

"A good defense shouldn't be easy to learn in two days," Bosa said. "So it's a fun challenge. Obviously seeing it live is a lot different than sitting at home reviewing on my book. … It's not as much the athletic part of it. It's just seeing the field, understanding the formation, seeing shifts. There's a lot of moving pieces. I think it's a dynamic defense."

It's a defense who involves fast and relentless hitting, which is how Bosa has played his entire career. Even last season, when he was battling a bunch of injuries, Bosa still recorded 7.5 sacks and 39 tackles.

"Joey Bosa, he'd be good doing anything," Staley said. "We're trying to get him into a new comfort zone -- there are some things we're asking him to do that he hasn't done before. I think that more than anything, what he does best he'll be able to do at a high level. Some of the other things that are brand new for him will help not only himself but his teammates and we've tried to map that out for him. He's been great."

"You need premium players to play the type of defense we hope to play."

Perhaps the safest way to slow Bosa down is to bring a dog around, which perhaps is why Bosa doesn't have one ("I can barely take care of myself," he has said).

But he loves them. He slowly crawled up on the field to hug the Chargers' rescue mascot "Bolty" saying, "Come play with me," and hugged him tight.

So the best way to stop Bosa? Dog hugs and a sports drink from the snack cart.

BRYAN BULAGA

A Conversation With: Bryan Bulaga

By Hayley Elwood
Chargers.com
June 29, 2021

This summer, we thought we'd check in with a few Chargers players before training camp and the 2021 season kick into gear.

Our first conversation features right tackle Bryan Bulaga.

Though 2021 is only Bulaga's second season with the Chargers, the team has added many new faces on the offensive line making him the veteran Bolt in the room.

Here's my conversation with Bulaga on the offseason program, his reunion with Corey Linsley, thoughts on Rashawn Slater, and much more.

Year two with the Chargers, and a real offseason! How's it been going for you?

Bryan Bulaga: It's going really well. I think it's been really positive so far. Coach Staley, I think, is gonna be a phenomenal head coach in this league. I think he's changed the energy and kind of the mindset of the team already in the offseason, which has been good. For me personally, having o-line coach Frank Smith, I think he's a very good football coach as well. He's really fun to be around. He teaches the scheme well, he's able to adapt to systems that guys have been in and what they've done and kind of convert it to the new scheme that we're going to be going with. It's been really good so far.

Frank Smith, in his presser, mentioned four Cs: "clear, consistent, concise communication." How does that philosophy benefit this offensive line?

Bulaga: First things first, with us up front, it's all about communication. I think when you can have good communication in the offensive line room, that's only gonna help the group perform better on Sundays. Obviously, throughout a game week or throughout training camp or what we've been in right now, especially with the new scheme, we're installing things and seeing it for the first time, so being on the field with it for the first time, there's gonna be a lot of questions. There's gonna be things that we don't have the answers to right now because this is new to all the guys, but having a coach who's able to communicate those things and be clear about what we need to do and make sure there's no gray area is great.

One of the new guys on this offensive line is a familiar face for you in Corey Linsley. He said you played a really big part in him coming out here. I joked with him, how good of a salesman are you?!

Bulaga: *laughs* Corey didn't need me to sell him! To me, he's been one of the best centers in the league for at least the last three or four years. I played with him for quite a long time. When I knew he was probably going to hit the market, I definitely kind of picked his brain a bit. When it's the offseason, we don't talk about football too much but this one we did and I was just trying to see where he was at. Where were places he'd be interested in? Turns out the Chargers were looking for a center! I was able to kind of communicate with him, especially with new coaches, who I wasn't overly familiar with, but when Brandon (Staley) was hired, I had spoken to Brandon and then spoken to Frank, so I was able to give Corey some insight as to what to expect and what kind of the overall feel and vibe was for the new coaches. Obviously at the end of the day, he makes his own decision and what's best for him and his family, but I just kind of did my best to communicate with him kind of what the deal was out here and the outlook of the team and what to expect. Fortunate for us, he chose to come here.

What does his presence mean on this offensive line?

Bulaga: I think when you have a guy that is as intelligent as he is, that eases a lot of minds, not only from a coach's standpoint, but he's going to be extremely beneficial for Justin (Herbert.) He is one of the smartest guys I know, not only on the football field but also off it. To have a guy snapping the ball to you that has seen everything; scheme-wise there's stuff that he's used to with this new offense. To have a guy that can take control at the line of scrimmage making calls, making IDs, and helping Justin identify things, and taking that off of his plate is big time. Obviously for us up front, there's no secrets about it, the center gets us all on the same page. He's the guy making the calls, he's doing all those things. He gets everyone the right messaging up and down the line. To have a guy who can do that and perform at a very high level, it's huge.

And speaking to him off the field, he's the guy Aaron Rodgers wants to challenge in "Jeopardy!" So, he's got that intelligence!

Bulaga: He does! I think Corey would give him a pretty good run. I think there would be some random questions Corey may not know but Aaron probably would, but he'd definitely give him a run for his money. No doubt.

What're your impressions of Rashawn Slater?

Bulaga: Very impressed with him. Putting my scouting hat on right now even though I'm not a scout, I think physical traits-wise, he checks all those boxes. I think movement and his footwork and how smooth he is in pass protection and run, those are all things that are good and essential, but I think so far from what we have gone through on the field and watching tape and seeing how he's picked up things, I'm very impressed by it. I think he's gonna be a guy that catches on really quick and is able to at least certainly get comfortable with the scheme before we go out there for the first time and do it for real. Obviously throughout any rookie campaign, I experienced the same thing, there's gonna be ups and downs, that's all just part of it. But everything that he's shown so far is positive and he's just gonna continue to learn, continue to grow, and continue to get more comfortable.

You mention it, you've been in that position before as a first-round, first-year tackle. What's the most important thing you could share with him?

Bulaga: I'm not gonna share all my secrets! But look, I've had a couple discussions with him already and that'll only get deeper as we get into training camp and get closer to Week 1. But for me, the biggest thing is being comfortable with the scheme, be comfortable with what your assignments are. If you're on (the same) page with what you're supposed to do, you can go out there and play fast. If you're kind of unsure about either an assignment, or a look, or something, it only causes you to play slower and I can assure you the guys across from us are not playing slow! I think for him, just make sure you're always mentally on top of what you need to do. If you have questions, you have a lot of guys in the room who've played a lot of ball. Especially in the offensive line room, no question is a bad question for us, we've all experienced it, or gone through it, or seen it.

It's gotta be a good feeling because he's coming into a pretty veteran group. It's funny because it's only your second year on the Chargers, but you're the elder statesman on this offensive line. Most of the other guys are new. So that's gotta be a good situation for Slater in terms of having that veteran leadership, presence, and guys to lean on.

Bulaga: Right now, having (Matt) Feiler next to him who's played a lot of ball. He's a good veteran, he's as solid as they come. Obviously, Corey just a yard or two down from him being able to help him out with things is enormous. I was very fortunate when I was a rookie (in Green Bay) I had Josh Sitton next to me. He was an All-Pro, Pro Bowler, and I got to play with him for a while before he moved to left guard. Then I had T.J. Lang next to me. Being able as a rookie to be next to a veteran who understands football in general and help you out with what to expect is definitely beneficial. It can calm your nerves a little bit, even though it's not gonna help totally cause at the end of the day, the nerves are always gonna be there! But I think it's definitely gonna be helpful for him to have guys playing with him and next to him and helping him out.

We talked about Corey Linsley, but then Jared Cook joins this team. Kyler Fackrell joins this team. All of a sudden you have these former Packers coming out west! How crazy is that?

Bulaga: You know, it's good to see familiar faces. And that's something that I can definitely get behind, familiar faces. These aren't guys they just picked up out of anywhere. These are guys who have played a lot of football. They're proven. They've done a lot of good things throughout their careers. I'm excited to have them. I'm looking forward to once we get into training camp and being with these guys every single day for hours on end, I'm looking forward to it. I think they're gonna make a big impact on the team.

And lastly, in 2021 what do you hope to accomplish this season?

Bulaga: Look, as offensive linemen, we're not really "me" guys, we're more "we" guys. I think everyone would say this, everyone has personal goals and that's all good. But I think number one is win. I think last year, a lot of guys have a bad taste in their mouths, and I wasn't here the year prior, but no one likes losing. It's not fun. It's not enjoyable. It's tough to go to work every day when you're not performing well and you're not playing well and things aren't going your way on the field. It's tough.

So I think it's winning. It's what everyone wants at the end of the day, it's the end goal. Obviously, guys have personal success and that adds to winning. That helps the team win, when individuals perform well. But us up front, we work in unison. When someone's having a bad practice or a bad day, it reflects on everybody. So it's our job to make sure that all of us up front are doing our job and performing well because that's only gonna benefit Justin, the backs, and the receivers. For me personally, I don't really have any (goals), I just wanna win. And I'll do everything in my ability to help this football team win and perform better.

JARED COOK

Connection with Chargers new coaches made Jared Cook deal come to pass

By Jeff Miller
Los Angeles Times
March 22, 2021

He has been an NFL coordinator one other time and for just 23 games.

So there's still uncertainty about what exactly Joe Lombardi will bring to the Chargers' offense in 2021.

There is no question, however, that he helped deliver the team's new tight end.

Jared Cook explained Monday that he signed with the Chargers in large part because of his relationships with Lombardi and offensive line coach Frank Smith.

"I think it's important to have coaches who understand what type of player you are; who you are as a person," Cook said. "Being with those guys was huge."

Cook, who turns 34 in April, is entering his 13th season. He replaces Hunter Henry, who departed via free agency for New England, and represents an experienced inside threat for young quarterback Justin Herbert.

For the last two seasons, Cook was with New Orleans, where Lombardi was the longtime quarterbacks coach.

Cook spent 2017 and 2018 with the then-Oakland Raiders. During the latter season, Smith was his position coach.

The two have kept in touch since, Cook saying Smith made a lasting impression because of his coaching style, particularly his willingness to listen to players and "not be a dictator but actually be a coach."

In 2018, Cook had a career year, finishing with 68 receptions for 896 yards and six touchdowns. He also made his first Pro Bowl, an achievement he duplicated in 2019 with the Saints.

The Chargers will need production from Cook coming off a season in which Henry emerged as one of Herbert's most-trusted targets.

With Keenan Allen and Mike Williams at receiver and Austin Ekeler coming out of the backfield, Cook will be a big body — 6 foot 5, 254 pounds — roaming along the seams.

He has 22 touchdown catches over the last three seasons, including a career-high nine in 2019. The Chargers haven't had a tight end produce as many as nine touchdowns in a season since 2014, when Antonio Gates had 12.

Asked what he'll bring to his new team, Cook said "a chance to kind of open up the offense a little bit more, spread the field … exploit the mismatches when you're given them."

Along with spending two seasons with Drew Brees, Cook also played for one season — 2016 — with Aaron Rodgers in Green Bay. Having watched Herbert from afar in 2020, he said he appreciates all the potential.

"Justin Herbert also was a huge reason that I came here," Cook said. "He can sling the ball."

Chargers general manager Tom Telesco is in the process of rebuilding the line to better protect Herbert, overhauling 80% of the offensive front. Right tackle Bryan Bulaga likely will be the only returnee.

The team also has a new coaching staff headed by Brandon Staley, who hired Lombardi in January to be the offensive coordinator.

His only previous experience in that role was unspectacular, Lombardi fired by Detroit in October 2015 as the Lions failed to adapt to the scheme he was attempting to employ.

"I know what Joe brings to the table," Cook said. "He's a grinder. Joe will stay till four or five in the morning making sure your offense is ready to go. He puts in the time and he puts in the effort. I've seen it firsthand.

Chargers TE Jared Cook looks to make big plays with Justin Herbert

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
March 22, 2021

One of Jared Cook's favorite plays of his career was catching a 36-yard pass from a scrambling Aaron Rodgers near the sideline to set up the winning field goal in a 2017 playoff game against the Dallas Cowboys.

"Definitely a memorable play," the former Green Bay Packer said Monday.

Cook is entering his 13th season and turns 34 next month, but the veteran tight end said he's not done making acrobatic catches. He's already envisioning big plays in crucial moments with the Chargers and quarterback Justin Herbert, the reigning NFL Offensive Rookie of the Year.

Cook officially joined the Chargers on Monday after signing his contract, which is reportedly for one year with $4.5 million guaranteed.

"That's what the game is about," Cook said about creating memorable moments with Herbert. "It's about making those big-time plays.

"He can sling the ball, man. He came on last year unexpectedly when nobody was expecting him to be a starter and I think he did a really good job at that."

But Herbert wasn't the only reason why Cook joined the Chargers. The two-time Pro Bowl tight end is familiar with offensive coordinator Joe Lombardi and considers offensive line coach Frank Smith a good friend.

Cook had one of his best seasons in 2018 with the Raiders when Smith was the tight ends coach at the time. Cook recorded 68 receptions for 896 yards, six touchdowns and was named a Pro Bowler during his lone season with Smith. But Smith and Cook have kept in contact and texted often during free agency.

Smith recruited Cook and Lombardi provided familiarity. Cook spent the past two seasons playing for the New Orleans Saints, where Lombardi was the quarterbacks coach before joining the Chargers this year.

“I mostly talked with Frank Smith, but I know what Joe brings to the table,” said Cook, who is joining his sixth NFL team. “He’s a grinder. Joe will stay up until 4 or 5 in the morning making sure that your offense is ready to go week in and week out and he puts in the time and he puts in the effort and I’ve seen it firsthand.

“To be a part of that the past two years, really kinda made the decision easy. (Lombardi) was a big part of our success with the Saints – a huge part.”

Cook wants to be a mentor to the younger players and learn from the skill players, such as wide receivers Keenan Allen and Mike Williams. Cook has played with star wideouts Michael Thomas of the Saints and Davante Adams with the Packers, but the veteran tight end said the Chargers’ wide receivers are just as dynamic.

But Cook wants to do more than just be a leader. He sees a bright future for the Chargers’ offense.

“A chance to help young players,” Cook said for reasons why he joined the Chargers. “Also, a chance to be able to open up the offense a little bit more, spread the field, get on safeties and linebackers, exploit the mismatches when you’re getting them and being able to score touchdowns and move the ball.”

Familiarity with coaches draws Cook to sign with Chargers

By Joe Reedy
Associated Press
March 22, 2021

COSTA MESA, Calif. (AP) — Jared Cook has signed with a new team, and he will have two coaches who are very familiar with him.

Cook said Monday that offensive coordinator Joe Lombardi and offensive line coach Frank Smith influenced the veteran tight end to sign a one-year contract with the Los Angeles Chargers.

“I think it’s important to have coaches that understand what type of player you are and who you are as a person. A lot of times in free agency that takes away some of the unknowns in visiting different teams,” Cook said.

Lombardi and Smith were hired by new head coach Brandon Staley. Cook said he was in contact with Smith and Lombardi throughout the free agency process.

Smith was the Raiders’ tight end coach the past three seasons, including in 2018 when Cook made the Pro Bowl for the first time and set career highs for catches (68) and yards (896) along with six touchdowns.

“He gets to understand your thought process while playing the game at 100 miles per hour so that he can better understand you as a player and be able to coach you better,” Cook said of Smith. “I think that’s important. Because Frank laid out that type of relationship, me and him have always kept in contact.”

Cook’s previous two seasons were in New Orleans, where Lombardi was the quarterbacks coach. Cook had a career-high nine TDs in 2019 and then had 37 receptions for 504 yards and seven touchdowns last season.

“He was the big reason for a lot of our gameplans — really, most of our gameplans. He would go break down film for us, then deliver everything that he broke down,” Cook said. “He would also be the guy that’s up in the box telling us everything that he saw during the game. His tutelage, his football IQ is very high.”

Cook said he hopes to be able to help the offense spread the field and create mismatches with safeties and linebackers. His 22 touchdowns over the past three seasons are second in the league among tight ends. He is expected to fill the void left when Hunter Henry signed with the New England Patriots.

Besides Cook, the Chargers also have Stephen Anderson and Donald Parham on the roster at tight end.

Offensive guard Oday Aboushi also had his first availability since agreeing to terms Saturday on a one-year deal. He lined up mostly at right guard last season in Detroit, but he said the coaching staff hasn’t told him which side they have in mind for him with Los Angeles.

“Last year, earning the opportunity to go in there and start — starting and playing the way I did at that level — just gives you more confidence moving forward and what I can do better next season,” he said.

MICHAEL DAVIS

The Chargers' main 'Vato': Michael Davis' background inspiration for his NFL success

By Shelley Smith
ESPN.com
March 31, 2021

COSTA MESA, Calif. -- There was a time in Michael Davis' life he wasn't sure where he'd be now. But where he is now is a pretty nice place, having just signed a three-year deal worth $25.2 million ($15 million guaranteed) to stay with the Los Angeles Chargers and be close with his mother and son.

"She cried," Davis said about his mom. And he cried along with her.

Nothing like home. Other teams offered more money. But none of them could offer the family-like dynamic that the Chargers possess. And it is the inspiration of family which has helped Davis emerge from being an undrafted free agent in 2017 to a key member of the Chargers' defense moving forward.

Davis was raised by his mother, Ana Martinez, who is from Mexico. His father, who was never in the picture, is black. He identifies with his Mexican heritage down to the tattoos of Emiliano Zapata, a Mexican revolutionary, on one leg and Mexican artists Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo on the other. He's fluent in Spanish as well and loves the nickname that Chargers safety Jahleel Addae gave him during his rookie year in 2017 -- "Vato," which means dude, homeboy or friend.

It stuck. Now everybody calls Davis "Vato."

According to information provided by the NFL in 2019, 41.1 percent of Chargers fans are Hispanic, the largest percentage of any NFL team. Davis was a huge favorite when the team visited Mexico City in November 2019 for a Monday Night game against the Kansas City Chiefs in Estadio Azteca, a stadium Davis used to visit on trips with his mother. Davis dreamed of playing soccer in Estadio Azteca and says that playing there it was a dream come true.

He was raised in Glendale, California, by his mom and excelled (when he wanted to) in track and football at Glendale High School. Davis admits to not always being as motivated as he could have been, but his talent was evident. He was first team all-CIF in track and field in his senior year, won the Pacific League title in the 100-meter sprint three straight years and the 200 meter sprint four straight years.

His football career was far different -- Glendale won just six games in three years and recruitment was limited ... except for BYU athletic director Tom Holmoe, who appreciated Davis' speed and helped recruit him to Provo, Utah. Davis struggled at times with BYU -- temporarily losing his starting position as a senior to a time to a freshman -- but came off the bench to make an interception and 40-yard return against Michigan State that year, helping the Cougars to a 31-14 victory.

Davis' measurables -- he stands 6-foot-2 and runs a 4.4 in the 40 -- caught the eyes of the Chargers, who signed him after he went undrafted in 2017. Not being drafted created a chip on his shoulder that former Chargers DB coach Ron Milus noticed and honed. That's when Davis says that he started to realize what was possible on the football field.

"I think Ron Milus molded me into a corner," Davis said. "On top of that, I had to work on mentality. It's all about the mental game in the NFL, just those two things."

Davis' talent was showcased this past season after getting a pick-six off Tom Brady, taking the interception 78 yards for a touchdown. That's when things started to click, Davis said. He had a great follow-up performance against the Saints on Monday Night Football a week later.

"I started performing at my highest, at my best," Davis said. "Since then I was like, 'You know what? I actually have a chance to get an extra contract and hopefully stay with the Chargers.'"

Davis started 14 or 16 games for the Chargers in 2020 and had 62 tackles along with and three interceptions for 86 yards (the 78-yarder vs. Brady certainly helped in that department).

And that is a good thing for new head coach Brandon Staley, a former defensive coordinator who relies heavily on the secondary and likes to mix things around. And what Staley has in Davis is a wily veteran able (and more than willing) to pass on knowledge to younger players.

Staley told Davis he wanted to maximize his potential further, something that Davis likes to hear.

"They want me to take it to the next level with my game," he said. "I'm excited for that. I'm a little nervous, but I'm excited."

Davis is a father, as his son, Atticus, is still young enough to see his father in his prime, or what should be his prime.

Oh, and one more accolade: Davis spent four years as a tenor on his high school a capella singing team. So if you need a really speedy player with great hands and a high voice -- not to mention a nice salary for the next three years -- Davis is your guy.

Back in L.A., Michael Davis Ready to Go 'Next Level'

By Chris Hayre
Chargers.com
March 16, 2021

The first defensive player the Chargers agreed to terms with during free agency was one of their own.

Cornerback Michael Davis will return to Los Angeles on a multi-year contract, the team announced on Monday. The Glendale native, who began his NFL career with the Chargers as an undrafted free agent in 2017, has developed into a dependable starter.

New head coach Brandon Staley sees even more.

"Staley just told me that they're going to try to maximize my talents," Davis said. "They're going to work with me and try to maximize my potential. That's about it. That's what I'm hoping for – I'm hoping that he can take my game to the next level."

Davis has made 35 starts over the last three seasons. In 2020, he led the team in passes defended (14) and interceptions (3).

Can't-Miss Play: Michael Davis Reads Tom Brady's Throw for Speedy Pick-Six
In Week 4 against the Super Bowl Champion Tampa Bay Buccaneers, Davis picked off Tom Brady and returned it 78 yards for a touchdown. It wasn't until the following week, though, that Davis said he started to play his best ball.

"In my mind, it might have been the Saints game" he said. "Up until the Saints game, I was struggling a little bit with consistency. Then, after the Saints game, I think that's when everything clicked. That's when everything came together and I started performing at my highest, at my best. Since then, I was like, 'You know what? I actually have a chance to get an extra contract and hopefully stay with the Chargers.'"

Davis, who turned 26 in January, credits former defensive backs coach Ron Milus for developing him into the player he is today. The BYU product said he "wasn't really a corner yet" until Milus became his coach.

Things will be different for Davis in 2021. Four years ago he was fighting for a roster spot. Now, he's now the longest-tenured member of the Chargers secondary.

Former coaches and teammates have moved on. But as he enters the prime of his career, Davis has an opportunity – with an assist from the new staff – "to take it to the next level with my game."

He'll also have a trio of Pro Bowlers to help him get there.

"We're getting D.J. [S Derwin James Jr.] back" he said. "There will be me, D.J. – obviously, we still have [CB] Chris Harris [Jr.]. We have [DE] Joey [Bosa]. I think our defense is still going to be stacked. We're still a young defense, and I think we can come out and kick some ass."

Chargers DB Michael Davis seeks to maximize potential with new 3-year deal

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
March 17, 2021

Michael Davis returned to his BYU stomping grounds Monday to clear his mind while NFL teams contacted his agent about possibly having the cornerback play for a team not named the Chargers.

“I was just kinda mad that I actually didn’t know what was going to happen,” Davis said Tuesday. “I just hate not knowing the unknown.”

Davis’ uneasy feeling didn’t last long because his hometown team also called – the one that helped groom the Glendale native from an undrafted free agent to a prized free-agent cornerback.

Davis passed on bigger offers from multiple teams and remained with the Chargers to stay close to his family. Davis agreed to terms on a three-year deal that is reportedly worth $25.2 million with $15 million guaranteed.

“I came up here to Utah just to try to get away from everything,” Davis said. “I had a few teams interested, but to be honest, I wanted to stay home. I’m a Cali boy and I’m close to my family and I’m just happy the Chargers called.”

Davis, 26, had a long path before securing a second long-term NFL contract. He was raised by a single mother, Ana Martinez, a native of Mexico, and attended Glendale High before playing at BYU. Davis joined the Chargers as an undrafted rookie in 2017 and made the 53-man roster as a special teams contributor.

“She cried,” Davis said about telling his mom the good news Monday. “She’s very happy because she knows that we’ve been through a lot. I’m just happy to see her happy. She’s happy I’m able to stay home.”

Davis received his starting opportunity midway through the 2018 season, but he says it wasn’t until after Week 5 against the New Orleans Saints last season when it finally clicked for him. He was no longer the inconsistent cornerback with size and speed.

“Up until the Saints game, I was struggling a little bit with consistency,” Davis said. “Then, after the Saints game, I think that’s when everything clicked. That’s when everything came together and I started performing at my highest, at my best. Since then, I was like, ‘You know what? I actually have a chance to get an extra contract and hopefully stay with the Chargers.’”

Davis is eager to return to Southern California to sign his new contract and celebrate with his mother and son, Atticus.

But Davis will be greeted by a new head coach in Brandon Staley and will play with new teammates in the Chargers’ secondary.

Cornerback Casey Hayward was released last week and safety Rayshawn Jenkins is expected to sign with the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Davis isn’t sure what his role will look like in 2021, but he’s expecting his play to reach the next level under Staley.

“Staley just told me that they’re going to try to maximize my talents,” Davis said. “They’re going to work with me and try to maximize my potential.”

AUSTIN EKELER

Austin Ekeler continues to 'pound' his way toward NFL elite status

By Jeff Tomko
Muscle & Fitness Magazine
June 15, 2021

Based on social media postings, running back Austin Ekeler looks awfully ready for the 2021 NFL season.

His Los Angeles Chargers teammates nicknamed him "Pound for Pound" — as in pound for pound the strongest player on the team's roster. The principle behind the 5'8", 200-pound pass-catching powerhouse's weight room wonders is his allegiance to what he labels a "guerilla style" training regimen.

Other athletes have gone all in with teams of experts customizing innovative percentage-based formulaic workout programs, as well as incorporating high-tech fitness trackers to document each night's sleep patterns and other health variables. Ekeler, meanwhile, sticks with his unorthodoxly old-school approach to working out: He lifts based on how he feels that day. "That tech stuff isn't for me," he says. "To me, it's all over the place. I have an idea of what I'm trying to get done in the gym and how my body is going to react."

That mind-body connection — as well as a ton of football talent — helped elevate Ekeler from an undrafted free agent in 2017 to becoming the Chargers No. 1 back in 2020 after signing a multi-year, $24.5 million contract following a breakthrough previous season.

Expectations for 2020 were set higher than his NFL Combine vertical leap (40.5 inches), until a freakish hamstring injury kept him out nearly half of last season, in which the Chargers finished 7-9.

"The hamstring injury was the longest I've ever had to sit out," Ekeler says. "In my head, I was sad — and in a lot of pain. But at the same time, I had a pretty good run at making it through every season."

Six months since the season ended, Ekeler says he's now back to 100 percent — he shared the proof on social media. It's also given him time to work on building his brand for broader audience. Having recently moved to Las Vegas, his foundation — Austin Ekeler Foundation — recently helped build a gym for a local high school. He's developed other diverse ventures as well, including part ownership of the "Flying Aces," a team in the FCF, a fan-controlled football league in which online participants get to call the plays, as well as an owner (and designer) of an online bottle lamp company.

And while technology has no place in his workouts, Ekeler has nearly 30,000 Twitch followers, where he's a constant participant. "I wouldn't say anything's changed," he says. "I've just had more access to resources. All the stuff that I'm involved with is my way of helping the people around me and my community."

But football — and football training — remain his top commitments. Even with a busy extracurricular schedule, it's impossible for Ekeler to ever skip a workout. That's good news for optimistic Chargers fans heading into training camp with re-energized expectations as Ekeler's return and 2020 Rookie of the Year Justin Herbert entering his second season make for a potentially explosive offense under new head coach Brandon Staley.

"Training is how I got to this point," Ekeler says. "I've done this my entire life. It's how I operate. I need to work out pretty much every day."

ROAD TO RECOVERY

As a 2017 undrafted free agent out of Western Colorado, Ekeler surprised everyone in 2019 by catching 92 passes for just under 1,000 yards and rushing for nearly 600 yards and 11 total touchdowns while sharing running back duties with Melvin Gordon.

His breakout season not only earned him a four-year deal worth $24.5 million, but the franchise also shipped Gordon to Denver in 2020, establishing Ekeler as the team's full-time running back.

The bar was immediately set high, but by Week 4, the worst-possible scenario took place against the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. Ekeler tore his left hamstring trying to jump back in an effort to evade a low tackle. "I immediately knew my hamstring wasn't OK," he says. "I almost passed out from the pain. It's one of the most painful injuries I've ever had."

He was placed on Injured Reserve, with a minimum eight-week recovery time expected. It kept him off the field, but no amount of pain could keep Ekeler out of the weight room. "I could still do upper body," he says.

But the main focus from Day 1 was getting back on the field — first step was alleviating the intense pain. Early on, Ekeler says he would go through 30 to 45 minutes of E-stim machine work on his left leg to get blood flowing. Each week, his progression slowly increased — he slowly began walking, then was able to stretch to help gradually increase his range of motion. "The goal was never to stretch past the healing point of the pain level," he says.

By Week 6, Ekeler, a self-described "quick healer," began performing single-leg Bosu ball squats, indicating to him at least that an early return was possible — until he tried running. "There was no chance that I could run," he admits. "I was going to need every bit of those eight weeks. Lucky there was bye week, in there." Ekeler finally returned in Week 12, pain-free, but when it came to football speed, he says he was nowhere near 100%. Despite missing nearly seven full games, he finished the season with 530 yards rushing and 54 receptions.

"I was feeling no pain, but I was definitely feeling slower, with no explosiveness after not running for eight weeks," Ekeler says. "But it's the NFL, you have to perform. So I was back on the field for that."

EKELER KNOWS SQUAT

Today, with training camp scheduled to begin on Aug. 1, Ekeler says he's at full speed — was evidenced by his first big test in the weight room — squats. His first time inside the weight rack, Ekeler stacked four plates on each side for what he called a solid triple.

"I was able to run at full speed, but I hadn't squatted in a while," Ekeler says. "I put some weight on the bar and it didn't bother my hamstring at all. So, I was like, let's try 405 for a few reps. I got three. That was pretty solid. Now I'm up to 13 reps."

In Ekeler's workout regimen, squats — heavy squats — are the foundation for the power and speed needed for football training. Although the weights keep increasing, Ekeler stays on the safe side by rarely if ever maxing out. He instead opting for three sets of three, usually at around 455 pounds.

But when he's feeling especially strong, Ekeler may toss a fifth plate and bang out a triple. "I feel like one rep is not really giving me that much," he says. "To me, three reps is better for my body — I don't have to put as much weight on the bar, which saves my knees a little bit."

Also a legday fixture for the running back are lunges. Since none of his workouts are ever repeated, Ekeler will always alternate variations, going from forward walking lunges on the turf to rear-elevated lunges.

Adding a power element to his training, Ekeler will oftentimes pair lunges with either a jumping movement or sprint out of a running back stance. "It goes from a power movement to straight-up explosive," he says. "I love that type of progress because it's exactly what football is like — you need to be strong and also be able to move explosively."

'GUERILLA' MENTALITY IN A 'DRAGON'S LAIR'

Having recently moved to Las Vegas, Ekeler does his training at the newly opened Dragon's Lair Gym, owned by seven-time Olympia 212 winner Flex Lewis. While he says the atmosphere rocks, the bodybuilding-type workouts that go on aren't always suitable for his football goals.

"Dragon's Lair is sick," he says. "Because it's a bodybuilding gym, it's got a great atmosphere and a whole lot of really fit people. Seeing so many people who are bigger than me is extra motivation. But they work out way too long for me. They'll work out for two hours doing biceps [laughs]."

For football performance Ekeler sticks with an array of full-body workouts. Some exercises, namely squats, remain a staple in his development. But when it comes to creating NFL-level explosiveness, Ekeler says it's all about the power clean.

"Both hang cleans and power cleans are so much more beneficial for football players because it works like, 90% of my muscle mass — legs, back shoulders, biceps, grip," he says. "It's just a very explosive movement."

In his words, the more you can clean — taking the bar from the ground, slinging than catching it — the faster and more explosive you'll become, especially when you're blowing by — or through — 250-pound linebackers.

His advice for athletes: Get your form right. "I see people do clean that the gym and the form is usually terrible," he says. "Get your mechanics right."

Ekeler says building better form starts with adding accessory moves, like low pulls, high pulls, even front squats to elevate your cleans. Use low weight at first, he says. "If you work on those things, um, there's the progressions individually of the cleans while you're doing cleans too," he says. "It's going to help you build the actual fundamentals of the clean and help you clean more."

As a pro, Ekeler says he doesn't need as much weight to get the most out of power cleans. Instead, four to six reps at 225 pounds is sufficient for running back explosion and all-pro conditioning. "When I'm done, I'm exhausted," he says. "I might have to take a break between the reps — 15-20 seconds just to regroup. But it's a big powerful explosive movement. If you can do that, you're a pretty explosive human being."

Chargers' Austin Ekeler Launches Gridiron Gaming Group

By Trent Murray
The Esports Observer
January 27, 2021

Los Angeles Chargers running back Austin Ekeler has formally launched Gridiron Gaming Group, a streaming collective for sports personalities. The group will launch with six signed players – fellow Chargers players Mike Williams and Justin Jones, Philadelphia Eagles cornerback Avonte Maddox, Las Vegas Raiders long snapper Trent Sieg, New York Jets defensive end Bryce Huff and Los Angeles Dodgers pitcher Tommy Kahnle.

Along with Ekeler, each player will operate their own livestreaming channel on Twitch, leveraging Gridiron Gaming Group to promote their streams, collaborate with other athletes in the group and grow their individual communities.

To celebrate the launch, the seven members will participate in a special streaming event on the morning of Super Bowl Sunday, Feb. 7. The members will host a three-hour broadcast across their channels, engaging with one another and their communities through giveaways, Q&A, and other activities.

Over the last year, Ekeler has grown his personal Twitch channel to 22K followers streaming games such as Fortnite and Call of Duty. He has also broadcast a number of hours in the Sports category which Twitch launched last summer.

Gridiron Gaming Group was founded by Ekeler and Dynamic Sports Group President and CEO Cameron Weiss.

In the last year, collaboration between streamers has been proven to serve as the fastest way to grow a Twitch channel. By participating in a collective together, each of the signed athletes will be able to accelerate the growth of their individual channels by playing games together and interacting with one another.

KYLER FACKRELL

A Conversation With: Kyler Fackrell

By Hayley Elwood
Chargers.com
July 20, 2021

This summer, we thought we'd check in with a few Chargers players before the 2021 season kicks into gear.

Our third conversation features Kyler Fackrell.

Fackrell is one of the newest members of the Chargers after joining the team this spring in free agency.

Here's more from Fackrell on why he joined the Bolts, thoughts on the defense, his reunions with a few former teammates, and more.

Welcome to the Chargers! I know it's been a couple months since you signed and you've now gone through the offseason program, but take us back, why did you choose to sign with this team?

Kyler Fackrell: It had a lot to do with coach Staley. I know Corey (Linsley) and I'm very excited to be back on a team with Corey and Bryan Bulaga. I was there (in Green Bay) with Jared Cook, too. Those are all great guys. But really, it was the conversation that I had with coach Staley and learning his passion for football and for defense and it was kind of the energy that he brings.

So shortly after you signed, Staley mentioned how much respect he had for your game coming from the time he spent in the NFC North coaching for the Bears while you were with the Packers. What are your impressions of him?

Fackrell: He seems really like a players' coach. Exactly what the players would want. I think he's very receptive to what the players want and is fluid in that way trying to make things right for us. We've kind of gone through the installs through this offseason and I think it's pretty clear that he's kind of a brilliant mind defensively. So, I think it's a great combination.

What's it been like getting acclimated to the Chargers organization and the teammates and coaches?

Fackrell: It's been great. They have a great group of guys. I think it's a pretty young team, there's kind of a select few vets, but overall, it's a pretty young team and a team I think that's really kind of hungry. They put together a group of guys who want to work and want to be great.

How does this defense really benefit your skillset?

Fackrell: I think getting the way coach Staley coaches this defense and the way they set up things is for us as EDGE players and for everyone to play fast and to get into one-on-one situations and favorable matchups, that's kind of what it's all about. It's gonna be great for me, for us as EDGE players, and for us on defense.

Staley mentioned your versatility, general manager Tom Telesco mentioned it, you just mentioned it as well. How has that benefited you throughout your career so far?

Fackrell: I think that's what kind of makes a 3-4 defense hard on offenses, when they don't know if the EDGE players are rushing or dropping. Obviously, most EDGE players want to rush and want to get sacks – and that's important – but being able to do both and to be able to drop into coverage and be reliable is a big strength.

Uchenna Nwosu said if anything goes wrong on the field, they can count on you. They're looking to you. You're new to this team but you're a veteran in this league. How does that veteran leadership benefit you and your role now?

Fackrell: I think other than Joey (Bosa) and me, who are the same year, the other guys in the group are young. I think experience really is a huge strength just having seen a lot of football and seeing what offenses try to do. I hope that I'll be able to pass some of that knowledge and little tips to those younger guys to help them get to that stage faster.

You mentioned some of those familiar faces (and former teammates) earlier. I was talking to Bryan Bulaga and asked if he'd ever anticipate having all these Packer reunions out west? For you, how helpful is it to have those guys out here in a new environment?

Fackrell: It's been great. I think especially being out here and out west, this is closer to where I grew up. I grew up in Arizona so it's a little more familiar to me. But again, kind of integrating in a new team and going to a team where you don't know anybody, it's good to know guys and have that "in" already.

What can you say about Bulaga and Linsley and if you got to know Jared Cook at all, and what they'll bring to this team?

Fackrell: They're gonna bring a ton of experience and a ton of knowledge. I think that was a big reason why Corey was brought in, too, to kind of work with Justin Herbert. They're great guys, they're great players. In the locker room, they're gonna be a great influence on what is a pretty young team.

And then lastly, what makes you most excited about being a Charger?

Fackrell: I mean everything. It's really a perfect situation for me, for my family. Being able to live here close to home, close to family, close to friends and all that. The organization has been amazing. I loved meeting with Tom Telesco and ownership. It's been great and I can tell already that it's a great group of guys, guys who want to work and break into that next level and make the playoffs and hopefully make a Super Bowl run.

MATT FEILER

Matt Feiler's Journey Defined By 'Grit, Ambition, Hustle'

By Hayley Elwood
Chargers.com
April 13, 2021

Shortly after Matt Feiler signed a contract with the Chargers, his college, Bloomsburg University of Pennsylvania, tweeted a summary of his journey to and through the NFL thus far – from Division II school to his new contract with the Bolts.

The words that accompanied the tweet, "grit, ambition, hustle," have defined that path.

"I definitely didn't see myself getting here," Feiler said. "It was always my dream to be a professional football player, but it never really crossed my mind. Especially, coming out of a D-II school, that I'd make it as far as I did. Looking back, I'm just grateful things played out the way they did."

Feiler's professional journey started in 2014 when he attended rookie minicamp with the Houston Texans as an undrafted free agent. He went on to spend that season on the team's practice squad. Fast forward to the following year, and the Pittsburgh Steelers claimed him off waivers from Houston and then signed him to their practice squad. He spent the next five seasons in Pittsburgh, eventually earning an active roster spot and then assumed a starting role midway through the 2018 season at right tackle. In 2020, he became the team's starter at left guard.

Feiler credits training in the weight room and developing more of an understanding of schemes as keys to his progression in this league.

"He's productive, reliable, and position flexible," mentioned Chargers assistant offensive line coach Shaun Sarrett.

Sarrett was with Feiler in Pittsburgh and the two have reunited out here with Sarrett joining head coach Brandon Staley's staff.

"It's another person here to make things more comfortable for me," Feiler mentioned. "Just having a familiar face here and someone who (you) can help lean on to help you find stuff or ask questions makes you feel more comfortable."

The versatility that Sarrett discussed played a big part in Feiler coming out west. "Matt Feiler's a guy that I really value," mentioned Brandon Staley. "(He has) right tackle flexibility, played on the right side then goes into left guard. That's a huge stance transition for a player, but he did it seamlessly … We felt like this guy knows what it takes … I feel like we got him at the right point of his career where he still has a lot to prove."

But along with his skills, Feiler's journey has certainly molded him into the player and person he is today, and it's something he's bringing with him to this Chargers locker room.

"He truly is a 'team' before 'me' guy," Sarrett continued. "He is the type of player that doesn't blink in the face of adversity."

Communication is Key for Matt Feiler & Corey Linsley

By Hayley Elwood
Chargers.com
March 19, 2021

"We've got to get better up front, some of it is talent. There are different ways to approach that."

That was general manager Tom Telesco discussing the state of the Chargers offensive line shortly after the 2020 season ended.

Fast forward two months, and the Chargers approached some help via free agency with the additions of Corey Linsley and Matt Feiler.

The All-Pro center, Linsley, joins the Bolts after spending the last seven seasons in Green Bay. Feiler spent time at tackle and guard during his tenure in Pittsburgh with the Steelers but will play guard for the Chargers.

Linsley adds to the veteran presence on the offensive line and detailed what qualities he's bringing out to L.A.

"I try to communicate as quickly as I can," Linsley said. "I feel like that's the most important thing for a center, (is) to be able to identify the front and get everybody on the same page as quickly as you possibly can. That's something that I've taken pride in.

"It takes everybody, but when we get up to the line of scrimmage, my most important job is to get everybody on the same page. If guys have questions, communicate with everybody on the offensive line — and the quarterback, as well — effectively. Communication is key. I can reach guys in pass block, but it doesn't mean anything if everybody isn't on the same page and we're all going in different directions. That's the biggest thing on my plate that I have to take care of."

Feiler brings versatility not only with positions but with sides of the line as well, as he mentioned he's played both on the left and right. He also worked his way from undrafted free agent to starter in the NFL and credits Hall of Fame guard Mike Munchak, who was Feiler's offensive line coach for a few seasons in Pittsburgh, for his success.

But as he now joins this Chargers line, he, like Linsley, referenced the importance of communication as they adjust to working together.

"As long as we keep the communication open between everybody — to me, that's the way that we all get on the same page and have the same goal," Feiler said. "Once we all get the same goal and the same mindset, everything will start clicking."

ALOHI GILMAN

Kahuku grad Alohi Gilman set to give away 200 LA Chargers cleat to his community

By Cody Krupp
KITV Island News (Hawaii)
January 26, 2021

Every time LA Chargers rookie Alohi Gilman walked into their team facilities there would be a big crate of cleats sitting there. His first thought was his hometown, the tight knit community of Laie.

As the saying goes "one man's junk is another man's treasure." Tomorrow the Kahuku grad will give them away, maybe making a dream come true to those that were not long ago in his same shoes.

"Being raised in a small town, we don't have nothing. We use cleats till they break, till they have holes in them so I just asked them if I could get all these cleats at the end of the year and that's how the idea started," Gilman said.

Gilman was taken in the 6th round of this past April's NFL Draft, just seven picks after practically his next door neighbor Bradlee Anae was drafted by the Dallas Cowboys.

The community then organized an epic drive by parade and made their way from Laie to Kahuku and Haaula. Now Gilman has put together his own drive by event, but instead of a parade it is a drive way cleat give away. Starting tomorrow at 4pm will give out about 200 Chargers game or practice worn cleats to the community he credits for in getting him to where he is today.

"Anybody is welcome doesn't matter what age you are, it is first come first serve basis. Got some magic cleats in there right now some of my teammates are in there with their names on it still. For me if I were a kid and were able to get a pair of Keenan Allen cleats or one of my idols or any NFL player with not having much just having that alone even if it was a size to big I probably would have loved it cause it's something I would be able to be motivated with," Gilman said.

The former Notre Dame now Chargers safety played mostly on special teams as a rookie this season but did make his first career start in week 17 against the Super Bowl bound Kansas City Chiefs. A career high three tackles and hit the quarterback for the first time but had to leave late in the game to be evaluated for a concussion.

JUSTIN HERBERT

Justin Herbert went from 'Justin Who?' at Oregon to a Chargers standout in five years

By Jeff Miller
Los Angeles Times
July 27, 2021

He went from No. 2 on his team to No. 1 in his league, collecting numerous franchise and NFL records during a wholly unexpected offensive rookie of the year season.

Stunning as it was, fast-tracking is nothing new to Justin Herbert, who arrived as the sixth-string quarterback at Oregon and bolted into the starting lineup only six games into his freshman year.

To appreciate how meteoric the rise of the Chargers quarterback has been, consider that it was in August of 2016 that then-Ducks wide receiver Darren Carrington called him this:

"Justin, the freshman from Eugene. I forget his last name."

Just five years ago — Five! — even one of his teammates didn't know it was Justin "Herbert." This week — as the Chargers gather in Costa Mesa for the opening of training camp — all of football knows him ... and well.

Last season, Herbert produced more passing touchdowns (31), total touchdowns (36) and 300-yard games (eight) than any NFL rookie in history.

He finished with more yards than Aaron Rodgers, better accuracy than Patrick Mahomes and a higher rating than Philip Rivers.

He was at his best under pressure, on third down and in prime time.

So, entering Year 2, Herbert is expected to be, ah, better?

"There are no guarantees in this league," said John Beck, Herbert's personal coach. "There are a lot of guys on the other side of the ball getting paid a lot of money to stop you. And, as a quarterback, you need your teammates too. But, in terms of what Justin can control, he has a great chance to be an amazing quarterback in this league for a long time."

The Chargers have a new coach in Brandon Staley and a new offense that is more nuanced and places additional responsibility on the quarterback. Herbert has admitted he has a lot to learn, even as a former straight-A student.

Beck, who works with Herbert at 3DQB in Huntington Beach, predicted any stalling in 2021 will be the result of the transition to a new scheme rather than the development of the orchestrator of that scheme.

"Justin's going to be an improved football player, no doubt," Beck said. "He's certainly going to be a better quarterback. If there are circumstances where the road becomes bumpy, I would believe it would be him getting accustomed to the new offense and he and his teammates building chemistry in a new system."

Herbert, 23, faced few expectations last July. Yes, he was the No. 6 overall pick, but the Chargers already had veteran Tyrod Taylor and the full intention of starting Taylor for the foreseeable future.

Things changed in Week 2 when Taylor was sidelined by a pregame medical accident minutes before kickoff. Herbert started and performed convincingly enough that he missed just four offensive snaps the rest of the season.

Today, everyone is forecasting greater things as he prepares to operate behind a rebuilt offensive line projected to make Herbert's life easier.

He suggested that muting the outside chatter won't be a problem. Herbert insisted he'll listen only to those whose opinions matter — family, teammates, coaches — just as he always has.

This is a player who grew up grounded in leafy, tree-lined Eugene, who has experienced broken bones and busted seasons, who had only one personal coach before joining up with Beck last year.

When he was in school, Herbert worked with one guy for one hour and, $100 later, told his father Mark that the money could be better spent elsewhere.

"The way you manage expectations is the outside expectations will never, ever, ever, ever approach your own," Staley said. "We just focus on him being as good as he can be, on him being himself, not trying to be somebody [else]."

Herbert, according to those who know him well, never has been anything but himself, even in the aftermath of his glorious 15-game NFL debut.

He returned to Oregon this summer and hosted a charity golf tournament that benefited KidSports, a local nonprofit that provides athletic opportunities for children and is the place where Herbert first experienced organized football.

His tournament sold out so fast that the field had to be expanded. More than $150,000 was raised by Herbert and his fellow "celebrities," a group that included star wide receiver Keenan Allen along with several other Chargers.

"I was as proud watching him give back through the golf tournament as I was watching him play last season," Mark said. "There are just some bigger things in life. I think he's on the right path to seeing that."

Herbert's father never expected his middle son to be an NFL star. The family lives practically within the shadow of Autzen Stadium, home of the Ducks and Herbert's stated ultimate destination growing up.

The NFL? That's a five-hour drive away in Seattle.

Until traveling to Denver to watch the Chargers in Week 8 last year, Mark hadn't been to an NFL game since the late 1980s. He often has pondered how and why so much good has happened to his son so quickly.

He said he considered the professional fate of other notable Pac-12 quarterbacks — think Josh Rosen and Sam Darnold — and wondered, "Why him? Just dumb luck?"

“This is all new to us,” Mark said. “We’re just grateful and gracious that the path he’s on seems like the right one. We’re just parents happy that he’s succeeding. Whatever it is, we’re grateful for it and I think Justin is too.”

It is an adjustment, your unassuming son suddenly sought for television commercials and gaining fame for things such as his latest haircut or ability to barbecue brisket.

A couple of days before the show this month, Herbert turned to Mark and said, “Dad, did I tell you I’m going to the ESPYs?” Mark went online to find out his son had been nominated for an award.

“That’s the way he is about a lot of things,” Mark said. “It’s like, you don’t need to tell anyone how good you are. If you’re really any good, people are going to know.”

For a player who seems to have everything and more, Herbert has experienced empty moments.

He broke his leg in high school and missed most of his junior season. He fractured his collarbone as a sophomore at Oregon. His first Ducks team finished 4-8.

There were times in college when Herbert questioned whether he belonged on a Power Five football field. At the 2020 draft combine, he said he didn’t know if was ready to be a starter in the pros because he’d never played in the NFL.

That admission generated outside doubt, former linebacker and current television analyst Emmanuel Acho saying Herbert “could potentially be one of the biggest mistakes of the draft.”

Beck was instrumental in cultivating Herbert’s belief in himself, along with his talent. The two bonded quickly, Beck explaining that they are “both thinkers” and learned in humbled environments rather than at elite camps.

“You just simply played ball,” said Beck, 39, a former NFL quarterback.

“That’s how you came up. We both came from a place where nobody’s telling you how great you are. You’re just self-motivated.”

In June, about 16 months after Herbert admitted he didn’t know if he could play in this league, Staley said the most impressive thing about the young quarterback was his presence.

He called Herbert “a commander in the offense” and pointed out how comfortable he looks going into and coming out of the huddle and making calls at the line of scrimmage.

All of this adds to the growing notion that this should be a second NFL season more special than the record-setting first.

“Justin has all the tools that you would want,” Beck said.

“He’s a smart kid. He’s very determined. It means a lot to him to play well. He’s fully invested. ... He’s exactly what you want when you pick a franchise quarterback.”

At football’s highest level, Herbert is on his way to establishing his game, just five years after someone in his huddle didn’t know his name.

Acts of Kindness: Justin Herbert hosts golf tourney to raise money for Kidsports

By Kendall Bartley
NBC16 KMTR (Eugene, Ore.)
April 9, 2021

EUGENE, Ore. - It’s where Eugene native Justin Herbert started his football journey - Kidsports, a local nonprofit providing youth sports programs for kids in our area.

Now the former Sheldon Irish and Oregon Duck quarterback is entering his second year in the NFL with the Los Angeles Chargers.

The hometown hero is now giving back to the nonprofit by hosting The Justin Herbert Golf Invitational.

“Eugene’s always been my home and I’ve loved that community and they’ve given me so much,” said Herbert. “If I have even the slightest chance at giving back and helping them, I’d love to do it.”

The Justin Herbert Invitational is on July 8th. It has a huge goal of raising $100,000 benefitting Kidsports.

Bev Smith, the executive director of Kidsports was ecstatic: "First of all, it’s incredibly heartwarming, and secondly, it just falls in line with the type of person Justin Herbert is and the family from which he leaned most of his values and principles."

Justin partnered with Kendall Auto Group, which is the presenting sponsor.

“When we partnered with Justin and talked about putting on an event that would help support the community, it didn’t take any conversation at all for us to decide if Kidsports would be the right fit,” said Amy Newport, the community relations specialist with Kendall Auto Group.

Kidsports was the program Justin grew up with.

“As Justin talked about an interview this year when he was going through some losing with the Chargers,” said Smith, “he mentioned that he had learned the importance of winning and losing and how to manage that through Kidsports. So, really what we would like our kids to learn is that sometimes you win, sometimes you learn, and the rest of the time you should be having fun - and I think that’s why Kidsports has managed to maintain its presence in the community for so long.”

Kidsports is a fun program that builds friendships and stability.

As Justin explains, ”I think it’s huge because I take a look at my life and without football, baseball and basketball, I don’t know what I’d do. I’d be in school and definitely learning, but football has been such a big part of my life and there are people all across the city that, given that same opportunity, they can shine. If we’re able to provide that for them, I think it’s a great opportunity.”

Now, Justin is hoping this golf tournament will provide just that.

“All of the money, all of the proceeds will go to making sure that every kid will have a chance to play.”

Smith explained what the money would mean to Kidsports.

“It would benefit us in all kinds of ways," she said. "Certainly we want and would love to fund free; we would love activities for children to be free, particularly for low income families, particularly families who have been affected by COVID-19 and the fires in our community. We try to find ways to get kids out here to play.”

The goal of $100,000 can go a long way, and Newport believes they are well on their way with fundraising already.

“I believe I’m being conservative in saying that we are going to blow that out of the water.”

The Real-Life Diet of Chargers Quarterback Justin Herbert, Who Lives on Subway Sandwiches

By Emily Abbate
GQ Magazine
November 19, 2020

The 2-7 Los Angeles Chargers are not having an amazing season. That having been said, their rookie quarterback Justin Herbert is doing an impressive job under center. He's being touted as the front-runner for offensive rookie of the year, and if you've got him on your fantasy team, you're probably doing a little dance every Sunday. The issue seems to be on the other side of the ball—the Chargers are excelling at blowing leads. Still, the former Oregon Duck says he's just grateful to be doing what he loves every single day.

"I'm honored to be playing for a great organization," he says. "Every week is another opportunity to play the game and I'm ready to get after it." GQ caught up with him recently to chat about his diet, which involves lots of team-catered meals and a steady rotation of fast-food sub sandwiches.

GQ: When are you up in the morning?

Justin Herbert: The day starts out pretty early. I wake up at about 5 a.m., immediately brush my teeth and head out the door. I live about 15 to 20 minutes away from the facility, and I really look forward to the drive because it gives me a chance to just listen to music and unwind.

I can't eat very much in the morning. I kind of have a weak stomach, so maybe I'll reach for a Gatorade protein bar or two. I usually stick with the chocolate peanut butter flavor. We lift at 6 a.m. for about an hour, and then we'll have a couple of meetings. I usually have just the right amount of energy to get through all of this, and then at 9:00 or 10:00, I'll have two slices of bacon, three eggs over easy, and two slices of wheat toast.

Are you big on hydrating?

Definitely. I drink a lot of water throughout the day. Normally it's about five or six bottles. I try to drink at least one right when I wake up. I think hydration is really important, and we've done a good job of integrating that.

When you say "we've done a good job," who is the "we" that you mention?

Well, we have a team nutritionist, but I really just mean the team. We make it a point to drink plenty of water.

Have you ever worked one-on-one with anyone to chat about your nutrition?

When I was training prior to the draft, I used a couple of food services that catered meals and had prepackaged meals ready to go for the day. When I did that, I was focused on low-dairy, low carb diets. It was a lot of protein. Now, since we're in season, I try to maintain my weight, and in that process I need to kick up the carbs a little bit.

What's for lunch?

We'll have whatever the team normally caters. So maybe it's a sandwich or it's rice and chicken—something along those lines. In the afternoon, I'll usually stop by the smoothie station that we have at the facility. In my smoothie, I put in strawberries, banana, mango, pineapple, Greek yogurt, and vanilla whey isolate protein powder.

So you're a fruit smoothie but a peanut butter chocolate protein bar guy?

I like to mix it up, you know?

And dinner?

At night after we get off, I normally just honestly stop at Subway. That's kind of what I've been living off for the past couple of weeks. Normally I'll get two sandwiches. One is a steak and cheese and then the other is the chicken bacon ranch, both on their Italian herbs and cheese bread. It's been working for me. It's a good thing to pick up on the way home.

When you're not grabbing Subway, what are some other things you may do for dinner?

If I have enough time, I'm definitely barbecuing. I've got a Traeger grill in my backyard and a bunch of Snake River Farms meats. Any time I get a chance to throw some of those on the grill, it's pretty great.

Do you have a sweet tooth?

I'm a big fan of mint chocolate chip ice cream and peanut butter cookies. But I've done a pretty good job over the past couple of months of staying away from that. Probably because I call it a night pretty soon after dinner, like at 8:10 or so. I get home at about 7:45. So I'll have dinner for like 15 or 20 minutes, and then it's always right around 8:10 that I turn the lights off.

That's pretty impressive.

I'm normally a night person and waking up early in the morning is not easy for me by any means. But it kind of comes with the job. It's something I have to do. So it's something that I've had to practice and it got easier over time. But it's still not easy at all.

Justin Herbert's misinterpreted personality becomes Chargers' gain

By Gilbert Manzano
Orange County Register
October 31, 2020

Jana Prikryl, the director of general science at the University of Oregon, didn't realize she had helped Justin Herbert change his major until a peer advisor identified him with a scream.

"Oh, my God, that was Justin Herbert," Prikryl recalled hearing when the 6-foot-6 Oregon quarterback left the office.

Herbert, now a star quarterback for the Chargers, submitted his change-of-major form to switch from biology to general science. Herbert was the second future NFL quarterback that Prikryl had assisted. Marcus Mariota was a general science major at Oregon a few years before Herbert.

"Embarrassingly, I did not know that he was Justin Herbert," Prikryl said in a phone interview last week. "I knew we had Justin Herbert and I knew he was fantastic, but I didn't put the face to the name."

Prikryl shouldn't be embarrassed. Not many knew of Herbert before he became a star at Oregon and the latest NFL rookie sensation.

Even now, as more become familiar with the name, not many truly know Herbert. Although, there were many guesses about his personality in the lead up to the 2020 NFL Draft.

Herbert was described as an introvert, also known as a shy person, and few NFL teams want a shy quarterback. But that didn't stop the Chargers from selecting Herbert with the No. 6 overall pick in April's draft.

They were well aware of Herbert's physical gifts, just like the other 31 teams, but perhaps the Chargers dug deeper in getting to know Herbert as a person.

"I think a lot of introverts get labeled with that word shy, lack of leadership," Chargers coach Anthony Lynn said. "My son is an introvert, so I raised one. I know what the tags are, but you just look at how people respond to them. That's all you need to know."

The Chargers did their personality research on Herbert and are now getting rewarded for it with weekly touchdown passes from his rocket right arm.

"Ultimately, this guy is just very talented," said Denver Broncos coach Vic Fangio, whose team hosts Herbert and the Chargers on Sunday. "Looks to me like he's made up of the right stuff to be a quarterback in the NFL, and fortunate for (the Chargers) and unfortunate for us, I think they found their quarterback for the next 10 to 15 years."

Herbert has only started five games, but he's played so well that questions are now being asked. How did a quarterback who is enjoying a historic NFL start that rivals Patrick Mahomes and Dan Marino become available at No. 6 for the Chargers?

Why didn't the Washington Football Team take Herbert second overall and why didn't other quarterback-needy teams leapfrog the Chargers in the draft order to take him?

Many draft experts described Herbert as having all the physical tools, but somehow that wasn't enough to shake the introvert label that hung like a dark cloud.

Of course, it wasn't all because of Herbert's quiet demeanor, but it likely played a part in why teams were skeptical, and it goes to show that swagger isn't everything. Sometimes saying less means there's more of other leadership qualities.

Herbert won't say teams got it wrong by passing on him and making him the third quarterback selected – that's not his personality – but he did say the introvert tag was incorrect.

"I wouldn't say that's fairly accurate," Herbert said. "I think on the surface it might appear that way, but when I really get to know people and the team, I think a lot of the guys on the team would tell you differently."

Many draft experts and talking heads have said they got it wrong with Herbert, but the Chargers should thank them because all the personality speculation they provided before the draft became their gain.

Herbert celebrated his first NFL victory against the Jacksonville Jaguars last week by giving star wide receiver Keenan Allen an enthusiastic slap on the behind.

"Yes, sir!" Herbert shouted at Allen.

That doesn't sound like a shy quarterback.

Here's how family members, teammates and former professors described Herbert as a person and leader:

THE REAL HERBERT

College recruiters also got it wrong with Herbert.

Herbert was a three-star high school recruit with no Division I FBS scholarship offers heading into his senior year at Sheldon High in Eugene, Ore. Herbert was set on attending Montana State to play with his older brother, Mitchell, before Oregon made an offer.

"He did not go to (football) camps because he practiced with his high school team," said Mark Herbert, Justin's father. "When other guys were looking for exposure to go to colleges, Justin was practicing with the little kid down the street that he'd grown up with or another kid he played middle school football with or somebody else because that was going to be their team in the fall."

Justin Herbert has a reputation for not looking ahead. He prioritizes the present and enjoyed it by playing baseball, basketball and forming a fishing club in high school.

In college, it wasn't all about making it to the NFL. It was also about improving as a biology student. Herbert agreed to be a biology professor's assistant even though it took time away from football.

But helping the little kid down the street and having extracurricular activities didn't help Herbert in the college recruiting process and it was probably ignored by some NFL teams.

Multi-sport prep athletes have become a thing of the past. It's now about specializing in one sport and getting as much exposure as possible by participating in 7-on-7 tournaments, creating Youtube highlight videos and announcing every college offer received on Twitter.

You can't find Herbert on Twitter, although he does have an Instagram account.

"He didn't enroll early (at Oregon) because he wanted to play his senior year of baseball with his buddies," Mark Herbert said.

Justin Herbert stayed in one place before the NFL called, never leaving Oregon while the university's coaching staff changed twice in four years.

Mark Herbert recalled being asked by a local reporter if Herbert would consider transferring if he lost the quarterback job when Willie Taggart replaced Mark Helfrich as head coach in 2017.

"What are you talking about?" the older Herbert remembered asking. "I don't understand the line of question. What's Justin going to do? Get his degree in biology, he's gonna play football and he's gonna go to medical school or he's going to go to the NFL.

"I don't know what he's going to do, but he's not leaving. That's not what Justin does."

Justin Herbert also didn't leave when Mario Cristobal took over in 2018 and then stayed for his senior season, despite being projected as a first-round selection.

Sticking around for an extra year to play with friends gave pundits more time to analyze Herbert as armchair psychologists.

He wasn't viewed as the committed teammate who wanted to help win a Pac-12 championship. Instead, he was the quarterback who struggled against Arizona State and lacked the alpha-male personality to lead an NFL locker room.

But Herbert proved in high school and college that he doesn't run from adversity and makes it work with what he has. Those are the leadership traits that went unnoticed, and he's showing it again in the NFL by elevating undrafted players such as Jalen Guyton, Tyron Johnson and Donald Parham and doing it without his top offensive linemen, Bryan Bulaga and Trai Turner.

Herbert gets everyone involved and is not afraid to ask for advice. But all of that was lost during the lead up to the draft and it became the Herbert family's gain.

Mark and his wife, Holly, were rooting for their son to play for the Chargers. They have family ties to Southern California.

Justin Herbert's paternal grandfather, Roger, played football and ran track for Fullerton College before transferring to Oregon State. Herbert's maternal grandfather, Rich Schwab, grew up in San Diego before playing football at Oregon.

"We looked at (the draft order), 'Hey, Los Angeles all the way.'" Mark Herbert said. "Oh my goodness, travel-wise, and family-wise, team-wise … a lot of things pointing to the Chargers."

Mark Herbert credited the grandfathers for Justin's professionalism and said his son got plenty of good qualities from his mother Holly.

"I'd say Justin is fiercely loyal and fiercely focused and dedicated and definitely gets that from her," Mark said.

Justin Herbert's love for science likely came from his father, who was a science and biology teacher for middle school and high school students.

HERBERT, THE COMEDIAN

Chargers defensive tackle Linval Joseph played four seasons with recently retired Giants quarterback Eli Manning. The two-time Super Bowl champion was also described as an introvert.

Joseph sees similarities between Manning and Herbert.

"I felt like there was two different types of Elis," Joseph said. "You have funny Eli and then you have 'get the job done' Eli. Two minutes in the quarter, fourth quarter, need this drive and he woke up, and when he woke up, he made those big throws, made those big plays, and I see that in Herbert. I really do.

"I feel like he's going to have a great career and once we put everything in order, he's going to be elite. He's going to be great."

Chargers rookie wide receiver K.J. Hill can attest to Herbert's comedic side. Hill explained why Herbert was shown in a scene of "Hard Knocks" doing a lengthy "whassup" from the popular Budweiser commercials.

"I told him you gotta say the 'whassup' in the huddle," Hill said. "I told him to say it in the huddle before he called a play or something like that. It was something silly like that. He was practicing basically before he did it to get my OK if it was good or not."

Herbert and Hill texted each other after being drafted by the Chargers and have become close friends.

"Inside the locker room, (he's) making jokes, talking," Hill said about Herbert. "He has not been a quiet guy since I've been around him. We're always talking about anything and everything, so I feel like he got a great personality and great competitor side that I love about him, too."

Hill said he's a better "Call of Duty" player than Herbert, but he gave his quarterback the edge in golf.

"Justin likes to golf," Hill said. "I told him the only close thing I get to golf is Top Golf."

HERBERT, THE TUTOR

Mark Carrier, a professor at Oregon, was in need of a teacher's assistant for his Biology 212 course. Herbert was one of his best students, but Carrier assumed he didn't have time to teach the material to other students for the upcoming quarter.

“I figured no way a football player is going to have the time to do that, but in passing one day, I told him, ‘Hey, you know if you weren’t so busy being the quarterback of the football team I would definitely offer you this role,’” Carrier recalled.

Without hesitation, Herbert took the offer and assisted the class of about 200 students.

“It’s a pretty interactive class time,” Carrier said. “You can tell if people are going to hide what they know or help others along. Justin was the kind of guy who helped the people around him.

“It was clear to the people around him he understood the material more quickly than most. He didn’t struggle as much as people tend to do. It’s a very challenging course. He was very helpful to the people around him.”

At the time, it wasn’t certain that Herbert would be a top NFL draft pick. Carrier said Herbert expressed interest in a career in medicine or becoming a researcher.

“I was just really interested with how everything worked out (in biology) and science and kinda how your body processes things and kinda explaining the natural phenomena that happened around us,” Herbert said.

Biology sounds as complex as breaking down NFL defenses. Herbert being able to grasp intricate material at a fast pace while also teaching it is perhaps another leadership sign (and an indicator of future success) that went unnoticed.

“That might be a reach, but it’s a good analogy,” Herbert said about comparing football to biology. “Having a good understanding of defenses, coverages and things like that. It definitely helps.”

Herbert said his top passion has always been football. He’d said he would likely be a coach right now if he wasn’t an NFL quarterback.

“Hopefully I’d be coaching the game or somewhere involved in the game,” Herbert said. “I just love football too much to not be around it.”

That’s the real Justin Herbert. Passionate about football, but with other interests. Not the loudest, but a quiet genius with an occasional comedic side.

“I think he’s more outgoing than what people give him credit for, but that’s OK,” Lynn said.

The Chargers said that’s OK to Herbert’s personality and now, as Fangio mused, they stand to reap the rewards for years to come.

Chargers’ Justin Herbert learning he can’t let the perils of running in the NFL slide

By Sam Farmer
Los Angeles Times
October 15, 2020

Justin Herbert, with his smooth throwing motion and surgical precision, has proven he’s already a top-notch NFL passer.

Now, the 6-foot-6 Chargers rookie needs to work on his going-to-the-ground game.

He took off running in his first career game and clobbered Kansas City linebacker Damien Wilson when they collided near the sideline. Whereas Herbert nonchalantly popped to his feet, Wilson appeared knocked out cold.

Two weeks later, Herbert tore off a five-yard run against Tampa Bay and lowered his shoulder on Buccaneers safety Jordan Whitehead. This time, the defensive player got the better of the crash, as Herbert needed a few moments with his hands on his knees to compose himself. Whitehead was flagged for unnecessary roughness.

“Feet-first sliding is probably the best option I should go with,” Herbert conceded later. “I grew up playing baseball so I feel like I’m pretty comfortable with sliding. It’s a little tough on the grass, your cleats get stuck a little bit, but it’s definitely something I’ve been practicing. Moving forward, I’ll be better about it.”

Chargers coach Anthony Lynn hopes so. He could be forgiven for watching replays of those collisions through his fingers while covering his eyes.

“Bad coaching by me right there, bad coaching,” Lynn said. “I don’t want him taking hits like that, like he did from the Chiefs. … I want him to get down. I don’t want him to take those hits in the National Football League.”

Theoretically, Herbert could look across town for pointers from another young quarterback. The Rams’ Jared Goff, the son of a former Major League Baseball player, has had sliding issues of his own.

In the two years since the NFL made a rule change — stipulating a quarterback doesn’t have to slide feet first to be considered giving himself up, and instead is afforded the same defenseless-player protections when he dives forward — Goff has found himself getting “caught in between sometimes.”

“I’m used to going feet first, and I have my whole career,” Goff said. “And then in the last year or two, I want to go head first. I don’t want to lose those three yards. But at the same time, you’re kind of trying to figure out where your momentum is.”

His father, Jerry Goff, who played catcher in the majors for six years, wishes his son would hit the deck more often, yet understands why he doesn’t always do so.

“Do I encourage him to slide? Yeah, 100%,” the elder Goff said. “But there are times, like he did in the playoffs against Dallas, and a few times in college, where you’ve just got to deal with it and go get that first down. You’re not going to slide short in that situation. But I would say 90% or more, you’re just going to slide and play the next down.”

The dilemma is older than Red Grange. Should a quarterback risk injury by fighting for that extra yard, either by dropping a shoulder and delivering a blow, or by diving forward as a human missile?

Or should he sacrifice that extra yard or two and safely slide feet first?

“We’ve got to coach these quarterbacks out of the macho-man approach,” said Hall of Fame personnel executive Bill Polian, who thinks all NFL teams should build sliding pits at their facilities to teach quarterbacks. “Playoffs are one thing; that’s a different cat altogether. But in terms of the regular season, never lower your shoulder. Don’t take those kinds of blows. The rule is there to protect you: Go slide.”

Sometimes, even sliding feet first is unsafe. Last Saturday, Clemson quarterback Trevor Lawrence, the overwhelming favorite to go No. 1 in next spring’s NFL draft, took a shot to the helmet from University of Miami safety Amari Carter while sliding. Officials ejected Carter for targeting.

In 2006, Kansas City quarterback Trent Green absorbed a brutal hit to the head from Cincinnati defensive end Robert Geathers while sliding feet first. Green suffered a serious concussion and the replay reverberated throughout the league.

“I remember being like, ‘Yeah, see? I don’t want that to happen. I would rather dive head first, I’m in control of my head,’” recalled former Seattle Seahawks quarterback Matt Hasselbeck, who took a ribbing from his coaches about his aversion to sliding. “I sort of remember being made fun of by Mike Holmgren and Jim Zorn about how I didn’t slide, like I couldn’t slide.”

So Zorn, the former Seahawks quarterback who later coached the position for the team, unfurled a Slip ‘n Slide at practice in hopes of teaching his passers how to avoid big hits by gracefully going to the ground. He even brought in Seattle Mariners first baseman John Olerud as a sliding tutor.

“The thing was, we knew how to slide,” Hasselbeck said. “It wasn’t like we didn’t know. We just preferred to dive.”

According to NFL rules, a defender must pull up when a runner gives himself up with a feet-first slide. If a defender already has committed himself and makes unavoidable contact with the sliding runner, it is not a foul unless the defender makes forcible contact to the head or neck area of the runner with the helmet, shoulder or forearm, or commits some other act that is unnecessarily rough.

But the runner bears the responsibility of starting his slide with ample time for the defender to pull up and avoid the hit.

“Pursuing a guy, I would give him the benefit of the doubt that he was going to slide,” former Rams defensive tackle D’Marco Farr said. “But you’d better start that slide within two or three steps of me. Make it obvious. If not, I’m going to treat you as a runner that’s attacking my goal line, which means I’m going to try to knock your teeth out.”

The notion of sliding never appealed to Hall of Fame quarterback Steve Young, but not because he sought those extra yards at all costs. He just didn’t feel that sliding provided him enough protection.

“My own philosophy was sliding was a nightmare,” Young said. “Sliding is saying, ‘Just hit me in the face.’ I always thought it was much safer to go forward, find a soft spot forward.”

What’s more, Young said, officials routinely get the placement of the ball wrong when a player slides feet first.

“Inevitably, the referee gives you a spot farther back than you thought it would be, or than it should be,” he said. “It’s a weird thing. I don’t know what sliding does that creates this image that the ball’s downed earlier than it was.

“I always thought I got a better spot when I was going forward. It’s like an optical illusion for them. When I slid, nine times out of 10 I’d turn around and say, ‘Where are you marking that? That’s not right.’”

Not surprisingly, some of the quarterbacks who had the option of playing pro baseball — notably Seattle’s Russell Wilson and Arizona’s Kyler Murray — are the most graceful sliders.

“I think playing multiple sports is a very big thing in terms of getting those extra yards, also being smart, getting down,” Wilson, selected in two different MLB drafts, told reporters in 2017. “The ability to quickly slide, too. When you hit a ball in the gap, you’ve got to get to second base and get there fast. You’ve got to know where to slide, how to get around the tag, and everything else.

“I don’t really like sliding head first, never did when I was playing baseball. But sometimes it’s necessary. … You’ve got to be smart in how you do it.”

Not everyone is a pretty slider. Peyton Manning got an earful from his Denver teammates in 2012 when he clomped downfield against Carolina, then executed a hideous slide — think Evel Knievel at Caesars Palace — that excavated a sizeable divot when his left knee brace burrowed into the turf.

“It’s not even worth explaining what happened,” Manning told reporters at the time. “It looked bad, and the fact that my knee brace got caught, nobody wants to hear that. It is what it is, as they say, and it’s right there on film. I’m very aware that it’s fair game for criticism and ridicule.”

In those hold-your-breath bashes of bodies, it’s frequently the quarterback who comes away staggering. There’s a reason for that.

“Justin Herbert does no tackling. None,” Young said. “And then he’s running into people where that’s all they do is tackle.

“I used to see smaller guys in the defensive backfield, and I was like, ‘OK, I can take that guy on.’ But you’ve got to remember, even those guys, that’s all they do is tackle.”

When and whether a quarterback should slide often depends on where you’re standing, as in, which sideline.

“When it’s your own guy, you want him to get down,” Farr said. “When Kurt Warner scrambled, I’d be the first one yelling, ‘Get down!’ And I would tell him, ‘Your body doesn’t belong to you, it belongs to us.’ If he gets tagged, it affects us all.”

Young’s philosophy: Your most important play is your next one.

“Risks just to show your manhood don’t help you get to the next play,” he said. “The truth is, if you’ve still got the ball in your hand, there’s been a general failure anyway. Don’t compound it by trying to run over somebody to impress someone.”

After Herbert’s debut, while the Chargers and Chiefs were mingling on the field, Kansas City’s Patrick Mahomes offered him some words of advice: “Protect yourself on some of those runs.”

Sometimes, staying up requires getting down.

JUSTIN JONES

A Conversation With: Justin Jones

By Hayley Elwood
Chargers.com
July 6, 2021

This summer, we thought we'd check in with a few Chargers players before the 2021 season kicks into gear.

Our second conversation features defensive tackle Justin Jones.

2021 marks Jones' fourth season in the league and with experience under his belt, he's ready for what this year will bring.

Here's more from Jones on the benefits to the new defensive scheme, how he's fitting into it, what it's like being a first-time dad, and more.

2021 is your fourth season in the league, how crazy is it that it's already year four for you?

Justin Jones: It's gone by pretty fast, I'm not gonna lie. But, I'm definitely looking forward to this season. We've got a lot in store, especially for our defense and especially for our defensive front. The things we're doing this year are so crazy compared to what we've been doing previous seasons.

Yeah look, I'm not gonna ask you to give away any secrets! But what feels different?

Jones: We've got a lot more space now which frees a lot of us up. That's going to give us opportunities to get these one-on-ones and expose them. That'll be really good for us as a front because we've got some really good rushers on our team and now, we really get to showcase their abilities with the space.

How good does it feel to physically get out on the field with the new coaching staff in the offseason program?

Jones: At first, I was pretty anxious because I wanted to see how everything was going to look. But after being out here, listening to the coaches and what they're trying to accomplish, I'm really confident in the season. Like really, really confident. That's a good thing because normally going into a season, I'm not saying I wasn't confident, but you might still have your doubts on how we're gonna do certain things. But here, where we're at right now, it's more just this is how we're going to run it. When (the other team) does this, we're going to adjust to it like this. It's a legit game plan that's flexible enough to work against all teams.

It really feels like the tone is being set right now.

Jones: Facts. You can definitely feel it throughout the building.

How does your role this year compare to what you've done in the past?

Jones: This year, I feel like I'm gonna get a lot more one-on-ones and that's gonna let me really showcase my abilities and talents. In previous years, we've had really good rushers, and me being the young player, you had to allow those rushers to keep doing their things so we can win these games. So that kind of pushed me in a box, lowkey. So ability-wise, just really showing what I'm able to do, and now I'll be able to put that in front and show everybody what's going on.

This offseason, you've posted a lot of videos on your Instagram account of you working out. How has your training regimen changed or evolved since you came into the league?

Jones: We focus more so on function of movements and being explosive out of the actual football movements rather than your regular traditional lifts and traditional conditioning. We went more so with functionality and it's really gonna help my game and be really beneficial for me just being strong out of certain movements. Where I was training at, it was a new gym. The guy who was training me, I actually went to high school with him, but he went to school for this. So the gym was fairly new but we got to it and I had a really good offseason with him.

A couple years ago, you mentioned changing your diet, you picked up boxing. Is there anything new, besides some of your training, that you've implemented or are doing differently this year?

Jones: I went home! I went home for the first time in a long time. I hadn't been home for more than a week in years, so this was the first time I stayed home for about three months for the most part. It brought me back to humble beginnings.

Your daughter recenty turned six months old, what's being a dad like?

Jones: It's the greatest thing in the world, just watching her grow up. Seeing her try to walk, right now as we're on the phone she's in here walking around in her walker just touching stuff and trying to figure out where everything is. From her being first born to now, it's just crazy. She's grown so much. She's so interested in everything around her. She wants to talk. She wants to eat everything. She wants to be involved in everything. I see myself in her so much and it's beautiful.

What did it mean to get to spend that time with her in a really important part of her life?

Jones: It was beautiful. She came at the perfect time. Honestly, she was just what I needed. I'm glad she's here. She's healthy and she got to see her grandma and get to see other people in her family and that's beautiful, too.

What do you mean by saying "she was just what I needed?" Is it how some guys say they have a bigger purpose when kids become a part of their life?

Jones: That's exactly what it is and you never know how real it is until it's actually in front of you. She looks just like you and acts just like you and wants to be just like you or just like her mom. It's beautiful.

Lastly Justin, what are some things that you want to accomplish this year whether it's personal goals or with this team?

Jones: I just wanna win. I really enjoy winning, I love the ins and outs of the game, and I love performing with my teammates just seeing everybody make plays and me making plays myself is a really fun thing. So just being able to do that, especially in this new scheme which enables everybody to be who they are as players, it's just gonna be really cool and really scary for a lot of teams.

JOSHUA KELLEY

A Conversation With: Joshua Kelley

By Hayley Elwood
Chargers.com
July 13, 2021

This summer, we thought we'd check in with a few Chargers players before the 2021 season kicks into gear.

Our third conversation features running back Joshua Kelley.

After an unprecedented rookie season filled with personal highs and lows, Kelley is entering year two with a new wisdom and is excited for what's to come.

Here's more from Kelley on his expectations for his second season, the challenges he overcame in year one, what he learned from Justin Herbert, and more.

How has the offseason program gone for you?

Joshua Kelley: It's been really good. It's been really a treat, to be honest, actually having OTAs and being able to go in (to the facility) and learn a whole new system. I'm taking every day as a gift. Football is awesome, and I get to play it every single day. I'm not taking it for granted. This offseason has been good, but I'm ready and excited to get back to the season. It's been too long.

I believe that. You mentioned it, this is your first real offseason, because last year you guys dealt with the impact of COVID protocols, but you're also learning something new – again. How beneficial is it to physically be on that field instead of last year with it being virtual?

Kelley: It makes a huge difference. It really does. Having to actually run the plays, walk through the plays, see your coaches, talk to them. Being able to go through things on the field with your teammates to get a good feel for what everyone's doing around you. It makes a huge difference. It's an advantage. Not having that last season was definitely a disadvantage for all the rookies who came in. But it is what it is and you can't really pout about it anymore. So just having the chance to do it this year makes a difference and slows the game down more.

Now that you've lived it for a year, just how much faster is the NFL than college?

Kelley: It's definitely faster. It's moving parts that you have to understand like on special teams and offense. I think what helped me was as the season progressed and I was studying and watching tape, it slows down. And definitely going into this year, I'm starting to see things slow down. Obviously, we're walking through plays, but just my mental process and knowing what I'm doing or what my assignment is, everything is slowing down.

How do you pair that mental aspect and the physical aspect together? I know you're walking through things right now, but how do you take the mental aspect of what you learned last year and apply it to these walk throughs?

Kelley: I think the most important thing about the mental game is understanding how to be a pro. Understanding you can come in, you can clock in, but that's only half the battle. I think the real thing mentally is watching tape, asking questions, taking time to really dissect not just what you're doing, but the whole concept. I think that's a big part of understanding the whole game. What's the concept of this play? What's the concept of this return unit I'm on? Just understanding the holistic approach to everything makes your job easier because I know what everyone else around me is doing. I think as a rookie, I was just caught up in knowing what I was doing. I was just concerned about my assignment. It makes a big difference when you have that approach because then physically, you can just play faster.

When it comes to the rookie class from last year, it's kind of a special group because you guys experienced uncharted territory. No one had been through an offseason or an NFL season like that. Have you talked with some of your draft classmates at just how much better this year feels?

Kelley: What's funny is we talk about that a lot! Looking back on it, in hindsight, you'd love to have this opportunity, but I'm grateful for it. If we handled whatever was thrown at us last year, I think we can pretty much handle whatever is thrown at us these next couple years. But, in terms of reaching out to these rookies, I've gotten a chance to know them a lot recently. Especially Larry (Rountree) since he's in our room. I chat with him every single day. He's a great guy and we've been getting able to know each other. Obviously, he's a professional now, but I've been giving him some keys and tools and things that I've learned that have helped me. He's been soaking it up like a sponge and isn't afraid to ask, which is a really good trait.

What did you learn about yourself last season?

Kelley: I learned I can play in the NFL. I knew that, because I had confidence in myself, but I think I learned it about myself. Now it's a matter of playing faster and understanding, other people on the other side are pros, too. Nothing is going to come easy. But I think that was the biggest thing for me because all the stuff I went through, I was like okay, I've had success, I know I can play here, it's just all about knowing mentally, it's about bringing that same energy every single game that I belong here, and I can take that approach into this year.

You're always such a positive person, but when you talk about the mental approach, was it something you had to discover as the highs and lows of the season happened?

Kelley: For me, the highs were the easiest. Like you said, I'm positive, I always see the good things so going through high school and college, I always believed in myself, but I never understood how important that was until I got here. I really never had that until I got to the NFL where I realized I had to flip a switch mentally and believe in myself. You can be humble but you also need to have that confidence in yourself to play in this league and survive. That's something I've learned. Some guys have it, I've learned it.

When it comes to Justin Herbert, obviously a draft classmate of yours, what was it like being on the field with him and watching him grow as the season went on to end in an Offensive Rookie of the Year campaign?

Kelley: I learned a lot from him. What's crazy is we all came in at the same time and despite everything we went through, he had so much success his first year. He was just ballin'! I learned a lot from him because right off the bat, he knew he could play in this league. I had to learn that mental approach he had, but it rubbed off on me going into this year. I learned a lot from a guy who's a tremendous leader, picks guys up. He's just awesome. He's an awesome person and I'm really happy that we have him on our team!

What about running backs coach Derrick Foster and this new coaching staff?

Kelley: I love coach Foster. I just had this connection with him right away. I could just tell he has so much passion for the game of football. That's what I love as a coach; guys who love the game but can talk to you on a personal level. Ask you, 'How's your family? Do you want to watch some extra tape?' He's cool! It's a cool relationship. At the end of the day, we see him as a mentor and a friend.

It sounds like having that personal connection or him even taking a personal interest in you, it goes further, right?

Kelley: It definitely does. He told me his story, I had to do some research on him and how he got to Iowa and where he's at the Chargers right now. He's big-time! I learned a lot from him – just his perseverance – that's just a big contribution to our room!

What really excites you about this season?

Kelley: There are a lot of things that excite me about this season. I know we're gonna come out strong, I just really want to see our potential flourish, that's what I'm most excited about. This team has a lot of potential. In this locker room every day, I see the guys we have and the coaching staff we have, the potential is through the roof. I think we can make it happen. I think if our potential really does maximize, we can do some damage. I can say that, but we have to show it.

And what about showing that potential in front of fans for the first time in Los Angeles?

Kelley: That's exactly it! I'm so juiced about that. I've been watching the NBA playoffs with fans in the arena and I'm like dang, SoFi is gonna be crazy! Having fans in the stadium, there's nothing like that. We all feed off that energy, that buzz. Seeing people there, seeing your family in the stands and being like, ok, I really have to ball out now!

What are some of your goals for 2021?

Kelley: I definitely have a lot of goals on my mind. For me, my first goal is I want to do whatever it takes for this team to reach the next level. I know I have to have a huge role on special teams, offense, everything. But I wanna have a huge impact on this team. I want to rush for 1,000 yards, however that can be. I have a lot of high expectations for myself but I think I can reach them if I keep working and keep trusting the process.

COREY LINSLEY

Chargers' Corey Linsley protects, on and off the field

By Mark Whicker
Los Angeles Daily News
March 22, 2021

In April 2014, Corey Linsley came in 160th in the NFL's annual beauty contest.

Five months later, he was snapping the ball to Aaron Rodgers on the first play of the NFL season.

Talk about survive and advance.

J.C. Tretter, the starting center, was hurt two weeks earlier. Linsley's moment came at him like a locomotive through a tunnel. It did not help that the opponent was Seattle, in Seattle, where quarterbacks and eardrums are pressured equally. The Seahawks were reigning Super Bowl champs, and this was Thursday Night Football.

"It was a hell of a deal," Linsley said Friday, his first official day as a Charger. "On Saturday, I could feel my heart racing. I thought, 'I don't know if I can do this.' Doubt creeps into your mind."

It wasn't just a matter of delivering a football into Rodgers' prying hands. It was recognizing defensive fronts that were designed, by Pete Carroll, to be unrecognizable. It was deciding to slide the protections and, beyond that, making himself heard to four beleaguered mates.

And, yeah, it was blocking. Linsley lasted until the fifth round because, as centers go, he was on the frail side at 6-foot-3 and 296 pounds.

Careers have been vaporized by less.

But then Rodgers got up the day before the game and talked about the "I belong" moment.

"He said that when you get on the field, you're good enough to play in the NFL," Linsley recalled. "That helped me out a lot."

Linsley did belong. On his first play, Eddie Lacy gained six yards. On the third play, Lacy got 15 up the middle.

The Packers punted and then punted again, but recovered a fumble. Six plays later, John Kuhn scored. Seattle eventually won 36-16, but Linsley started all 16 games and started 99 in seven years. He has since refined that job to grunt-and-lift art.

In 2020, Linsley was rated the NFL's top center by Pro Football Focus and was named first-team All-Pro. The Packers chose to pay other people, so Linsley, one year after the Chargers signed Packers tackle, became the latest care package for a Chargers' offensive line that seems resistant to improvement. With quarterback Justin Herbert as the kid prince, you never have enough bodyguards.

“I don’t let things get too complicated,” Linsley said. “Obviously the weather here is a cool factor. But it’s a job, and now it’s up to me to hold up my end of the contract. I don’t need to tell Justin much. I remember every spectacular throw Aaron made, but his work and his intelligence for the game are why he’s the quarterback he is.”

Few NFL fans get stressed about the comings and goings of the big men. From the seats, they appear interchangeable.

Linsley’s move hits Green Bay harder, because the city saw the man outside the helmet. He was the Packers’ Walter Payton Award nominee, primarily for the work he and his wife Anna did on the part of Court Appointed Special Services.

Those who volunteer for CASA represent neglected and abused children. They go to court on their behalf, they meet with their kids once a week. In some cases, they’re de facto parents.

“We had one child whom Corey and Anna had worked with for more than a year,” said Kristin Jacobs, the executive director of the Brown County (Wis.) CASA chapter. “He had no idea that Corey was a football player. Then he was watching a game that went to overtime, and Corey was at midfield for the coin toss with his helmet off. He said, ‘Look, that’s my CASA.’”

While Linsley was getting squared away in Costa Mesa, Anna was checking out local CASA opportunities.

“We’re the voice for the children,” Linsley said. “They can’t testify for themselves in court. I had a pretty comfortable upbringing (in Youngstown, Ohio). I didn’t know what a social worker was. A situation like this affects children from all demographics, from all economic groups. Kristin had a connection to us because she’s from Youngstown originally. The more we learned, the more we were drawn to this. The fact that not everybody gets that, that not everybody knows what’s going on, is tragic.”

“It was a tough day for a lot of us when Corey and Anna left,” Jacobs said. “They approached this like any other volunteer. They took the 30 hours of training like everybody else.”

Andy Herman, who works for Packers.com, commemorated Linsley’s career by asking fans for $63 donations to CASA, since Linsley wore 63. In fewer than 12 hours they had delivered $5,000.

The Chargers will do well to prove they belong on Corey Linsley’s team. Some centers find a way to be central.

Corey Linsley is front and center of Chargers’ offensive line rebuild

By Jeff Miller
Los Angeles Times
March 20, 2021

Everything about the Chargers these days centers on Justin Herbert. Including the new center.

The team just signed Corey Linsley, a reigning All-Pro, to the richest contract in NFL history at the position.

At the core of that steep investment is the goal of giving Herbert and the Chargers every chance to succeed in the quarterback’s second season.

Linsley spent the last seven seasons with Green Bay and played in at least 13 games six of those years while the team went 71-40-1 and made three conference title games.

He brings all that positive experience and something else just as valuable to an offensive line that plays a critical role in Herbert’s development.

“When we get up to the line of scrimmage, my job, my most important job, is to get everybody on the same page ... being able to communicate with everybody on the O-line and the quarterback as well,” Linsley said. “Communication is key.

“I can reach guys in pass block or whatever, but it doesn’t mean anything if everybody isn’t on the same page and we’re all going different directions. That’s the biggest thing on my plate that I’ve got to take care of.”

Last season, Herbert played well enough to be chosen as the NFL’s best offensive rookie and did so behind a line so poor that general manager Tom Telesco is now working to change 80% of it.

If a rebuilt front anchored by Linsley can give Herbert more time and help, who knows how high Herbert’s ceiling might extend? Aiding him at the line of scrimmage pre-snap is the first step in protecting him.

Linsley, who turns 30 in July, said Packers quarterback Aaron Rodgers helped him understand the importance of identifying defenses quickly and communicating the proper calls.

“That’s something that I’ve taken pride in,” he said. “I felt like we had a really good thing going in Green Bay that we kind of built. It takes everybody.”

Linsley was a fifth-round draft pick out of Ohio State in 2014 but emerged rapidly, starting in his NFL debut and never relinquishing the job. So he knows about learning under fire, something Herbert perfected in 2020.

Easing Linsley’s transition to a new offense is the fact his old offense was quite similar. In discussions with Chargers right tackle Bryan Bulaga, another former Packer, Linsley said his understanding is matters won’t be vastly different for him.

“It seems like they’re coaching the same stuff,” he said. “You know, coming off the ball, an emphasis on the run game, playing physical and tough. That’s all the stuff that we talked about in Green Bay. ... That definitely drew me to here.”

So did Bulaga, Linsley explaining that he was sold on the Chargers by Bulaga’s assessment of the new coaching staff headed by Brandon Staley.

“There are a lot of outside factors and benefits coming here,” Linsley said. “But I wouldn’t have decided to come here if it wasn’t for the great things that Bryan said. The vibe that he got from the coaching staff, everything he said. It meant a lot to me.”

Bulaga probably will be the only returning starter up front as he attempts to bounce back from a season full of injuries and disappointment. Bulaga played only 38% of the Chargers’ offensive snaps a year ago. That’s the second-lowest total of his career, above only a 2017 season in which he missed 11 games.

Along with Linsley, the Chargers also signed former Pittsburgh lineman Matt Feiler in free agency. Feiler will play guard, although Friday he said he hasn’t been told which side.

Feiler also has played tackle, and the versatility can only help the Chargers coming off a season in which the right side of their offensive line had to be continually shuffled because of injuries.

So the Chargers still need a left tackle and another guard, with plenty of offseason and salary cap space still to find answers.

They most certainly believe they have their center, signing Linsley to a five-year deal that guarantees him $26 million and is worth up to $62.5 million.

“It really doesn’t mean anything unless I perform to that level,” he said. “I’m excited and thankful that the Chargers thought enough of me to offer me that contract. ... I owe them.”

New Charger Linsley looking to prove contract is worth it

By Joe Reedy
Associated Press
March 17, 2021

COSTA MESA, Calif. (AP) — Corey Linsley is the NFL’s highest-paid center after signing with the Los Angeles Chargers, but he realizes that means added pressure when training camp begins later this year.

“It feels good but it really doesn’t mean anything unless I perform to that level,” Linsley said. “I was telling my wife when it was starting to ramp up, we were talking about teams that needed centers and I said, ‘Look, we’re going to a place that fits. This is a job. I’ll be at the beach sometimes, but I got to live up to the contract that the team will give me. It’s a job first and foremost.’”

Linsley, whose five-year contract averages $12.5 million per season, and guard Matt Feiler were introduced as members of the Chargers on Friday. Both arrived in Southern California on Thursday and began meeting with coaches.

Both players are hoping to improve a Chargers offensive line that struggled last season, but Linsley will be looked upon to be the leader. The All-Pro spent seven seasons with Green Bay after being drafted in the fifth round in 2014 and has 99 regular-season and 11 postseason starts.

His other main job will be to keep the pocket clean for Justin Herbert, which didn't happen last season. Herbert was the Offensive Rookie of the Year, but was one of the most pressured quarterbacks in the league last season. Linsley allowed a league-low four pressures last season among centers who played 13 or more games, while LA's Dan Feeney was tied for the most at 33.

Linsley is also solid in the run game with only four blown blocks in 286 plays, but none resulting in lost yards. By comparison, Feeney had 16 blown blocks in 433 rushing snaps with a league-high 10 being plays that were stopped behind the line of scrimmage.

Currently, right tackle Bryan Bulaga is the only starter on the line likely to be back. With that status of offseason programs undetermined, Linsley knows there might not be a lot of time to build consistency.

"At the end of the day we got to get reps, we all gotta get on the same page, we got to learn how to communicate effectively in the room, not only on the field," he said. "That's going to take time, and we're gonna have to put in the work."

Linsley and Bulaga played together for five seasons in Green Bay, so that familiarity will be a plus. Linsley said Bulaga made a nice recruiting pitch to get him to come to Southern California, but that he hasn't had a chance to catch up with Herbert yet.

Feiler started at right tackle and left guard over the past three years with the Pittsburgh Steelers. He is likely to line up at left guard, where he started 13 games last season. The Steelers allowed only 70 regular-season sacks over the past three seasons, the fewest in the league.

Feiler said the coaching staff has told him he will line up at guard, but haven't specified which side. Right guard Trai Turner was released while left guard Forrest Lamp is a free agent.

"It was a little choppy at first. Switching your stance up to the other side, it's a little bit different," said Feiler of transitioning from tackle to guard. "I've played left guard before, so it was kind of like riding a bike. Just had to shake the rust off and get back into it."

RASHAWN SLATER

Chargers rookie Rashawn Slater's football love affair: 'The sacrifices only made it grow fonder'

By Daniel Popper
The Athletic
August 2, 2021

Reggie Slater wanted his two oldest sons to love basketball the way he did.

He had devoted his life to the game, going from undersized and undrafted to an eight-year NBA veteran. He played all over the world: Spain, Turkey, Italy. He had even spent two seasons playing in the now-defunct Continental Basketball League. He loved the game, and it loved him back. This was his calling, his passion. And he was determined to pass it on to his oldest sons R.J. and Rashawn.

The boys, though, gravitated to the gridiron. There was mystery in football. Reggie had never played. Kids needed their parents to sign a permission slip to start football when Reggie was growing up in the '80s, and his mom refused. "She thought I was going to get broke up too easy," Reggie recalls. So she directed him to the gym.

R.J. and Rashawn's conscious minds were made up. They loved football. Still, Reggie was undeterred. He decided to try and coax their subconscious minds instead.

Late at night, after R.J. and Rashawn had gone to bed, Reggie would check on his sons. He quietly opened the door to the bedroom and made sure they were still sleeping. Then he tiptoed his 6-foot-7 basketball frame across the floor, leaned his head down and whispered "basketball" in their ears.

"It never worked," Reggie said, laughing.

R.J., two years older than Rashawn, led the way, as big brothers do. Football was different. It was his own path. And he loved the physicality football offered. Rashawn felt the same pull. "Sibling admiration," Reggie says.

In the Slaters' hometown of Sugar Land, Texas, a new sports love affair was blossoming — foreign for Reggie, but undeniably magnetic for R.J. and Rashawn.

On paper, Rashawn Slater was destined for the basketball court. He had all the resources a kid could ask for — namely, the right athletic genes and an experienced father who was a willing and avid teacher.

But the heart is a fickle beast. Quick feet, natural strength and a 6-foot-5 build can be passed down from father to son. But desires? Those are generated and cultivated by the individual.

Rashawn desired, craved to be on the football field, to achieve greatness there.

And thus started his journey to the Los Angeles Chargers.

Rashawn entered into that unknown, onto that blank page, and willed himself to this point — to the highest levels of the sport he loves — through determination, through 6 a.m. wakeup calls at 15 years old, through three-hour workouts in the Houston summer sun, through late-night film sessions.

"He just had a drive at a very young age," R.J. said. "He knew what he wanted, and he was going to work for it despite what anybody says."

Rashawn Slater's athletic career started with a wide array of activities. Soccer. Baseball. Yes, basketball. Even taekwondo.

Reggie owned a gym in the Houston area. One section of the gym was a martial arts studio, and Rashawn took lessons there starting in middle school. He also competed. More like dominated.

"He was in matches and people were trying to bow out because he was a big kid and he was knocking the shit out of everybody," Reggie said. "People didn't even want to fight against him, man."

No weight classes in sixth grade.

"He kicked the guy and it was something out of a Marvel movie," Reggie said. "He'd get up, whoop somebody's ass, and then sit down for two or three hours. The matches weren't long. I can tell you that."

On Saturdays, Reggie would beckon R.J. and Rashawn to the family's outdoor basketball hoop. In the driveway, Reggie would run his sons through drills — dribbling with both hands, layups, footwork, mid-range jumpers.

When they were done, R.J. and Rashawn would scamper inside to the couch and turn on college football.

Reggie might not have been able to foster a love of basketball. But there was still plenty to impart. So Reggie would sit down beside his sons and tell stories from his career and life — not necessarily to draw them back to basketball, but to instill his pillars and values: work ethic, professionalism, drive, determination, focus, loyalty.

These stories and discussions were filled with pet idioms. Writers are taught to avoid cliches. Reggie basked in them, lived by them, parented by them. Sometimes, cliches are cliches for a reason.

"He's just always been in our ear," Rashawn said. "We didn't know it at the time, but all that stuff he was telling us, it was kind of shaping us under our skin."

The people that do well are the people that do what others aren't willing to do.

Talk is cheap. Actions are way louder.

You can sit and point fingers, or you can just get better.

Control the situation; don't let the situation control you.

Enjoy what you can enjoy while you can, but once the job's at hand, it's time to go to work.

These are the lessons Reggie learned in his playing days, from veterans such as Buck Williams, Kevin Willis and Charles Oakley.

Reggie would field calls from former teammates while in the car. They would reminisce and cycle through what-ifs from their careers. Rashawn would be in the passenger seat, listening intently, internalizing these valuable nuggets.

“Here’s the recipe,” Reggie said. “It’s up to you to put it all together.”

That recipe applies to football, just as it applies to basketball.

That is because it applies to life.

“As we worked, we saw it happen,” R.J. said. “It just became real and it became what we did.”

These idioms were the street lamps illuminating Rashawn’s path.

The boys both attended Clements High School in Sugar Land, their local public school. Clements played in the fierce and competitive Fort Bend district, part of the top flight of Texas high school football reserved for the largest schools. Clements was the district punching bag. They went 3-27 in Rashawn’s four seasons.

Rashawn had opportunities to play for private schools.

But he refused. Don’t point fingers. Get better.

Still, garnering recruiting recognition was like hiking through mud. R.J. was a quality high school football player and had interest from Ivy League schools. He ultimately decided to enroll and play at the Air Force Academy.

Rashawn watched his brother’s recruiting process and had an epiphany. He needed to get better — much better — if he wanted to reach his goal of playing at a high-profile Division I program.

“It definitely helped Rashawn,” R.J. said, “because he kind of realized some of my shortfalls.”

“In Rashawn’s eye, if his brother was that good, and he wasn’t highly recruited, what is it that I need to do?” Reggie said.

Reggie owned that gym, Slater’s Sports Zone in Fort Bend, Texas. And there, local trainer Alonzo Ford was renting out space to work with Houston high school athletes. Ford worked in tandem with Antoine Murphy, a former Baylor offensive lineman and NFL camp body who specializes in offensive and defensive line development.

One day, Ford saw Rashawn playing basketball with his dad. He was big — very big — and light on his feet.

Ford approached Reggie in the parking lot.

“Man, you got to bring your son to me,” he remembered saying.

“He saw a prime specimen ready to be molded,” Reggie said.

Then the work began.

Ford headed the strength and conditioning. Murphy oversaw the football-specific training. Together, they helped Rashawn groom into a Division I prospect.

Murphy, in particular, was essential in teaching Rashawn the details of the position that laid the groundwork for the pinpoint and polished technique that made him a first-round pick.

“At an early point, I realized that you put yourself ahead by the way you work, but you also put yourself ahead by the way you execute technique,” Rashawn said. “Everyone is strong, everyone is fast. But do you have great technique? That’s when it started to build.”

Ford pushed Rashawn physically, concocting exercises and workouts to test his pupil’s genetic gifts. He put 500 pounds on the workout sled. He had Rashawn put one leg in a suspended loop and then jump with the other leg onto a 24-inch box.

“It’s fun training those type of athletes where you don’t really have a limit,” Ford said.

Murphy remembers meeting Rashawn for the first time.

“Big glasses,” he said. “So he looked kind of like a Poindexter kind of guy.”

But then Murphy saw him move.

“He could run like the wind and he could run all day,” Murphy said.

The glasses were misleading. Rashawn can come across as quiet and unassuming. He even says that during the pre-draft process, teams accused him of being “too nice.”

Rashawn’s response? “You’ve never watched the film.”

“I kind of have the ability to flip a switch like that,” he said.

Murphy saw it firsthand during those years of training. If Rashawn was getting ready to “lock in,” he would take off his glasses and hand them to Murphy.

“That’s how he gets if you beat him or if you do something that he feels like got a little dirty on him,” Murphy said. “When he hands you those glasses and he’s sweating profusely, that’s when you know, uh oh, it’s on now.”

“He’d go Clark Kent on them boys,” R.J. said.

Rashawn lived in the trenches as a high school player. He played every snap of the game as an offensive and defensive lineman. He had 10 sacks as a senior defensive end, earning All-District honors for offensive and defensive line.

Rashawn trained at both spots with Murphy.

“He would just beat guys,” Murphy said. “I had guys that were getting recruited by every school in America, and he would just beat them consistently and beat them easily and kind of put their mindset in the dumps. He would just do it easily, run back to me just laughing. ‘Ha, ha, ha.’ Just giggling.

“He’s approachable. He’s well-spoken. He’s sweet,” Murphy said. “But I’m telling you, if you make him mad, or when it’s time to turn the lights on and he’s focused, he turns into the Hulk.”

Ford and Murphy trained a group of local high school players, including Will Farrar and Dakota Crawford, two offensive linemen at Travis High School, and Dennis Osagiede, a defensive lineman at Ridge Point. All three went on to play college football.

The group saw Rashawn flipping that switch every day.

“If you look at him, yeah, he’s a big guy,” Osagiede said. “But his demeanor isn’t like, oh, he’s a fucking crusher. Nah. You just got to get in that ring with him. Ya feel me? You got to get on that field with him, and then you’ll see.”

“That dude is a whole different animal when you piss him off,” Crawford said.

The weeks during the football season were long and arduous. On top of his high school responsibilities, Rashawn was spending four days a week either training or studying with Ford and Murphy.

“That’s all I’ve known him as — a hard-working silent assassin,” Ford said.

Murphy developed Rashawn’s hand placement and usage by working him out on a boxing heavy bag. He regularly would go over to the family’s house to watch film with Rashawn upstairs. There, his football IQ took center stage.

“He’s a scholar,” Murphy said. “He doesn’t want to be surprised during the game.”

This eventually led Rashawn to create an idiom of his own.

“He says he feels most confident when he’s most prepared,” Reggie said. “I’ve heard him say that. I’m like, ‘Damn, that’s a great quote! I wish I had told you guys that.’”

The sessions with Ford and Murphy went year-round, including three times a week in the spring. Miles and miles of running, followed by footwork in the sand volleyball courts at the local park.

Inside, timed sprints on the basketball courts. Speed, conditioning, agility and technique work.

Osagiede, Farrar and Crawford became numb to Rashawn’s superhuman workout feats.

“He is so explosive, it’s ridiculous,” Crawford said.

The summer Houston heat was stifling. And Rashawn, well …

“That dude is the sweatiest person I’ve ever seen,” Crawford said.

“I’d come home, and he had his laundry hamper that was filled with soaking wet, sweaty clothes, because sometimes he’d work out twice a day,” Reggie said. “I knew that they were doing something positive there.”

Murphy would bring film cutups of NFL offensive linemen — Tyron Smith, Jason Peters, Andrew Whitworth — and watch with his players before and after their training sessions.

“I can remember waking up early on Saturdays at 6 a.m. and it would be me, Rashawn, Coach Ford and Coach Murphy just working,” Farrar said.

The workouts were ultra-competitive.

“When we went through one-on-ones, I knew I had to come with my shit if I wanted to win the rep or even like faze him,” Osagiede said.

Osagiede trained with Rashawn for three years.

“I can count on my hand how many times I beat him in reps,” he said.

Fueling all this was Rashawn’s inquisitive mind and unquenchable thirst for greatness.

“He took care of business at a young age,” Ford said.

Reggie remembers when a Northwestern recruiter came to the house to visit with Rashawn.

Typically those visits are simply sales pitches. Not with Rashawn.

“They were going over techniques,” Reggie said. “They went into the living room and moved some furniture and started talking about how do I become a better, more skilled NCAA player. It was very unusual. I’m sitting there eating brisket and biscuits. And these guys are in stances, talking about pad level.”

Once Rashawn committed to Northwestern, he “never wavered,” according to Murphy. After his standout senior season on both sides of the ball, bigger programs came calling. But they stood no chance.

“He made his mind up and gave his word,” Murphy said. “It’s over.”

There, the foundation that Murphy and Ford laid allowed Rashawn to blossom. He started for three years, first at right tackle and then at left tackle, before opting out of the 2020 season. He spent the fall working in Dallas with offensive line coach Duke Manyweather to prepare for the draft.

Rashawn never forgot the programs that passed on him.

“I’ve been an underdog my whole life,” Rashawn said. “It’s not leaving, because that’s just part of who I am now.”

His commitment only strengthened in college. The Slaters — including Reggie’s wife, Katie, the couple’s daughter Aliyh and youngest son Rylan — went on a cruise after Rashawn had finished his freshman season and started 12 games at right tackle.

The family lounged in pool chairs, sipped on piña coladas and ate at the buffet. Relaxed. But there was often one seat left empty.

Off on the cruise deck, not far away, Rashawn was doing pass protection sets.

Cruise-goers, including his own family members, looked on, befuddled and bewildered.

“Obviously, he got made fun of,” R.J. said. “The pass pro set looks kind of goofy sometimes. But that man did not shy away from busting it out anywhere, because he was going to hone his craft regardless of where he was. If it was a vacation or not, he was going to get better.”

This was deeper than early wake-up calls or exhausting workouts. This was a lifestyle, a love affair.

A calling.

“That extra level that a lot of people don’t get to,” R.J. said.

Moments after the Chargers selected Rashawn with the 13th pick in April’s draft, the baby-faced offensive tackle was asked on the ESPN broadcast for his message to his new quarterback Justin Herbert.

“I got your back,” replied Rashawn, the franchise’s new cornerstone left tackle.

For most, this was merely a generic stock answer. Player-speak. A cliche.

But, to the Slaters, cliches are cliches for a reason. They are not throwaway sayings. They are defining, essential principles.

They are how you create your own destiny.

Ford was watching the draft from a barbershop while his son got a haircut.

“That put chills through my body,” Ford said, “because he’s been a man of his word for so long. … I hope this quarterback understands he means that. No one is going to touch that guy. I’m putting my life on the line for this one.”

Basketball is in Rashawn’s blood. Football is in his heart.

A different game. A familiar devotion.

“He still has a love for the game that I feel like a lot of people lose once you get to the level of sacrifice he’s taken,” R.J. said. “But I feel like the sacrifices only made it grow fonder for him.”