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## Chargers Week 4 Media Availability

Thursday, September 30, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On preparing to face the Las Vegas Raiders:**

“There’s a lot in that question that I’d like to answer. They’ve really built a complete football team. I think their record is reflective of that because they’ve beaten three quality opponents to start the season. Those are three real NFL victories; beating Baltimore, Miami and Pittsburgh. Those guys are all playoff-caliber teams. What you’re seeing is a complete football team out there. I think you start with [Raiders QB] Derek [Carr] and how well he is playing. He was the AFC Offensive Player of the Month. He’s operating at an extremely high level. You can see that he truly is an extension of the head coach. The way they’re able to operate, a lot of it is because of how sharp Derek is. They’ve really surrounded him with a complete offense. I think that they have weapons in all areas — wideouts, runners, tight ends. What they’ve been able to do a nice job of, and I think that Derek has a lot to do with it, is they’ve been able to manage some of those O-line injuries. I think that they’ve really responded to some of that attrition on the O-line and they’ve been playing really high-level football. They’re the number one offense in the NFL. They’re throwing for over 370 [passing yards per game]. I think that they have 470, 480 [yards per game] of total offense. They’ve played real defenses. All of those defenses that they’ve played are outstanding. I think that they’re a very complete team on offense. On defense, you can’t say enough about the coaching job that [Raiders Defensive Coordinator] Gus Bradley and that staff are doing. It’s just a totally different-looking group in all three levels. They’re playing the game the right way. They’ve really added some play-makers on that side of the football. I think that they’re just playing really good team defense right now. If you take a look at their special teams, their kicker is as good as any in pro football. [Raiders K Daniel] Carlson has had an outstanding season. He’s nine-for-nine. He hit that bomb against Baltimore. Last week, he had another 50-yarder. He’s a really, really quality kicker in this league. [Raiders Special Teams Coordinator] Rich Bisaccia is a really good special teams coach in this league. There’s a very good reason why they’re 3-0 and you can see that all over the movie.”

#### **On QB Justin Herbert’s apparent hand injury against the Chiefs:**

“No. It’s one of those unfortunate quarterback things. You probably saw the replay; he hit his hand on a helmet on the follow-through. He wanted to grip the football for a second to kind of get his feeling back. We couldn’t give him the ball soon enough. But, then, the next play, he hits [WR] Keenan [Allen] like it never happened. God has blessed him with big, powerful hands. We’re thankful for that.”

#### **On the potential of DL Justin Jones and CB Chris Harris Jr. playing against the Raiders:**

“I’m optimistic about both of those guys. J.J. and Chris were in the walk-through today. I think that we’re going to get J.J. back full in practice today. Chris is trending positive. We’re still unpacking the true range of motion and strength. I think he’s trending positive, though. Justin’s certainly in a different place than he was last week, and so is Chris. We’re going to see how it goes, but I think you would expect to see them both in practice today.”

**On S Derwin Jones Jr.'s shoulder and if he will practice today:**

“He is going to be out there. He did have something in the game with his shoulder. We were able to get him into the training room. He came right back out. It was awesome. He came out right at the end of the two-minute drill. We talk about it with our team, that ‘warrior spirit,’ he certainly embodied that in that circumstance. He just got his helmet, went right back out there in the two-minute drive, and played the rest of the game. He has good strength and range of motion, so it’s nothing that we’re concerned about. It definitely speaks to Derwin’s competitive character.”

**On the potential of CB Ryan Smith returning from Reserve/Injured this week:**

“He’s going to start to practice this week. He’s been awesome in his rehab. I know that he was really disappointed that it happened in camp — you’re with a new team and now you’re out for a little bit. But he’s been really diligent with his work. It’s been fun to see his progress. We’re going to get him out there in practice this week. We still have that timeline on our side. We’re going to try and take advantage of that timeline so that we can truly make sure that he’s ready to go out there, but he’s going to practice this week.”

**On ‘any chance’ that Smith plays against the Raiders:**

“I don’t know that. We really want to make sure that he has his sea legs underneath of him. I think it’s one thing to get your rehab over with, but another thing to get your football legs underneath you because the big thing that you can’t minimize is that he didn’t practice at all during training camp. It’s not like he had some time with us that you can kind of bank on. He hasn’t really practiced with us. We want to make sure that he has his legs underneath him, and both physically and mentally. Then, we’ll see where we go from there.”

**On T Bryan Bulaga:**

“Trending well. I think that the procedure went well. He’s been, number one, a great resource for the guys. Just having him around is such an advantage. I think definitely trending positively that way. We’re going to see where it goes with that.”

**On the rationale behind Bulaga’s procedure:**

“In terms of his back, just making sure that thing quieted down. We’re going to use that timeline so that he can get back out there at full speed.”

**On how facing an opposing defensive coordinator who used to be with the Chargers ‘factors into anything’ with the team’s preparation:**

“I don’t think that it factors in too much. The thing about the NFL is that you have so much information on most people that there’s not really anywhere to hide. It’s more about the players that are in the game. I think that what Gus [Bradley] can do by being here, and those defensive coaches that were here, is they have a good sense of the talent level of all of our guys. From just a personnel standpoint, they just have a good idea of how good they are, their strengths and weaknesses. But, how we’re using them this year is different than it was when he was here. There is that that part of it. So much of the game is that chess match. Like I said, I think that guy is doing a great job coaching them. I think that they look completely different on defense. Those guys are playing really, really hard. As much as the offense for Vegas has had the storylines, I think that their defense has given them a chance in every game. It’s hard to win shootouts in this league. I think that they’ve been playing quality defense, which has allowed them to win.

**On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.:**

“K9 is doing everything that we’re asking him to do. I think that he’s at the beginning with us. We are trying to get him comfortable within his role. There have been some really good moments for him. And then, there have been some moments that we need him to produce more. I think that goes for a lot of guys. With young players in this league, the timeline for when it comes on is different for everybody. The biggest thing is we’re not disappointed at all of him. The fact that we have three guys that can start at that position is a real advantage. It’s an advantage for him. What we’re learning is just, truly, how to take advantage of his talent. Like I said, we’re at the beginning of that. He’s been awesome to coach.”

**On Raiders RB Josh Jacobs:**

“I have a lot of respect for this runner. I had a lot of respect for him at Bama [The University of Alabama], I know a lot of those coaches at Bama. They’ve produced so many good backs there. This guy is as good on contact as anybody. He’s a really good contact runner, he has really good balance and body control. He packs a punch on contact, he has a really low center of gravity, he can see. This guy can catch the football out of the backfield and he’s a willing pass-protector. He’s a guy that can be a complete back. He’s certainly a guy that, when he comes back in the offense, is going to help them. And they’re already a dangerous team. To have him out there full-speed just makes them even more dangerous.”

**On the depth of the Raiders’ offense:**

“They’re built extremely well on offense because they have a complete offense. They have three runners that I really respect. [Raiders RB] Kenyan Drake was in Miami when I was in Chicago, that guy gave us a lot of issues. He was in Arizona last year when I was with the Rams, he gave us a lot of issues. This guy has gas, he can flex out of the formation, catch the ball. He’s outstanding. [Raiders RB] Peyton Barber, I was in Chicago when he was in Tampa Bay, and this guy’s really good, too. They have three runners; they have all these receivers. The big part of how they play is they play with a lot of tight ends in the game. [Raiders TE Foster] Moreau, [Raiders TE Derek] Carrier, [Raiders TE] Darren [Waller] — that gives them an advantage of how’re you going to play them. And their receiving core is crazy because they have [Raiders WR Hunter] Renfrow and [Raiders WR Henry] Ruggs [III], who a lot of people know about. Henry’s got real deep speed, and Hunter is fantastic. But then they also have [Raiders WR] Zay Jones, who’s been a really productive player in this league, who I’ve played against in other places. And then they have [Raiders WR] Willie Snead [IV] who’s been fantastic. They have a lot of players on that side of the football. What they’ve also done a really good job of is the O-line position. They’ve really re-tooled that O-line and survived some attrition. They’re very well coached, they’re a very complete offense, and that’s where they’re the same as Kansas City. They’re dangerous on every down.”

**On the illegal shift penalties:**

“A big part of it is me, simulating in practice, a non-perfect play clock situation. A lot of times you can get into practice, and you have a play clock going on. But the consequence of, ‘Hey, now we’re out of the huddle here at ten and I don’t have time to unpack this play as it’s designed on paper. I have to get to the final formation, I don’t have time to get set, send the motion because the time’s on the clock.’ Simulating more of those middle-to-later in the clock breaks from the huddle. That’s normally when they occur — later in the clock. Just making sure we simulate a healthy amount of that. And then people taking ownership of their job. It’s an 11-man operation, and it’s even more than that with coaching. We’re going to continue to emphasize that, so we don’t have those costly penalties.”

**On G/T Brenden Jaimes:**

“Our thought process was on the tackle situation of if something were to happen to [T] Storm [Norton], we’re kicking [G] Matt [Feiler] out to right and [Michael] Schofield [III] can play guard against a team like that [Chiefs]. He has a lot of experience. And we felt like while we were going on the road, it’s loud and [Chiefs Defensive Coordinator Steve] Spagnuolo’s got designer stuff. A lot of stuff that Michael Schofield’s seen. We just felt that could be an advantage for us. We felt like we were guarded both ways. At tackle, if something happens to [T] Storm [Norton], we have [G] Matt [Feiler] out there. They can go toe-to-toe with [Chiefs DT] Chris Jones. By doing that, we were making sure we had a guard that’s ready. And Brenden’s been doing really well. I think we have a luxury pick in [Michael] Schofield [III] and his experience. He’s fit in really well with us. It’s definitely not a knock on Brenden at all, we’re super excited about his progress.”

**On the ‘functionality’ of the offensive line:**

“When you run the ball, a lot of it isn’t just the O-line; it’s tight ends. I was most curious on how we were going to be at that position — blocking at the point of attack and how we were going to express those personnel in terms of the run design. I wasn’t as concerned about the five guys up front; I was worried about the tight ends and how that was going to come together. That tells you a lot about the identity of your run game. What we’re discovering is who we are. What runs we’re most comfortable with versus the defenses that we’re playing, and how to truly utilize our people the right way. Because we play a lot of different groupings. In the run game, it’s truly getting in that sweet spot of who we like in the game and what runs feature those guys best. I felt like in the Kansas City game, especially in the fourth quarter, we really got into a rhythm running the football. In the first half, if you watch the tape, we’re close on a couple runs. We had some good design,

we were just a little off, where we felt like we could've split a couple that could've been big gainers. But in the second half, we went in at half time, adjusted and ran the football at a high level. At the beginning of the year when teams don't have as much inventory, you're still in that discovery phase. And we are, too with our own scheme. We're trending positive in that direction, and you need to. When you go on the road in a place that's that loud, running the football helps you. Our guys did a really good job of that in the second half."

**On RB Austin Ekeler:**

"The last two weeks especially, his presence in the backfield, catching the football, putting pressure, defend all five eligible receivers; I think that's big. When people are going to play you in zone coverage — if they're going to play two-deep zone, or they're going to try to put a roof over the coverage — you have to be able to access the backs in the short part of the field. Level one, level two. I felt like that came alive in a big way. And then in the run game, Austin's got really good vision, he's really good on contact. He's the type of guy that gets better as the game goes on, the more carries he's given. I felt like that showed itself in the game on Sunday. Now it's getting our complimentary backs their dose of carries, too. Making sure we have a good rotation there. But Austin's been fantastic. I think the last two weeks specifically, he's been coming alive in the passing game."

**On CB Asante Samuel Jr.'s being named NFL Defensive Rookie of the Month for September:**

"I'm really happy for Asante. We've talked a lot about him. One thing we talked about this morning is there can be an illusion in the NFL of how well you're doing. The interception that he had in the game against Kansas City shouldn't have happened. If he were covering the right guy, which is the guy that should've caught the ball; if he'd stayed on him, he probably wouldn't have made that interception. And he's probably not [Defensive] Rookie of the Month. That's the illusion of the NFL that I like to talk about. If he'd done the right thing on that play, then that play never happens. And then would we be thinking any different of him? Would we be any more pleased or displeased? We would be really happy with him, no matter what. But that interception is what won him [NFL Defensive] Rookie of the Month. Had he not had the interception, he's not Rookie of the Month. The good thing about Asante is he has a lot of self-awareness. He knows where he needs to go with his game. Him winning [Defensive] Rookie of the Month just shows you his capacity. He's been able to go nose-to-nose with a lot of really good opponents, with a lot of really good receivers the first three weeks. I think with him, he's at the beginning. We have the number one passing team in the NFL coming in this week. He's got to keep going, there's so much to improve on. But he's shown that he's up for the challenge."

**CORNERBACK ASANTE SAMUEL JR**

**On being named Defensive Rookie of the Month:**

"It was a blessing to get the award. I have it in my house right now, it's a blessing. But I'm still week to week. I still have to grind, I still have to get better. Continue to go out there and get better."

**On if he kept his interception ball from Kansas City:**

"Yes, I kept it this time. I made sure to keep it this time."

**On making the play that led to the interception:**

"It was a busted coverage, a broken play. I was just trying to survive the down. I was just trying to play football and make a play out there."

**On his growth since covering top receivers each week:**

"It started off in training camp, going against [WR] Mike Williams, [WR] Keenan Allen, [WR] Jalen Guyton. That prepared me for the season. Going against those great guys is definitely competition, and I'm a competitor. I want to compete every week. I'm just trying to excel my game and get better each week."

**On if the pace of the game has changed over the weeks:**

"It's slowing down a little bit, but it's still week to week. I'm learning new things each week, the nuances of the game, little things. I'm just trying to make my team better, make more plays so we can win more games."

**On the Chargers-Raiders rivalry:**

"It's a division game, and I know there's been a rivalry for a long time. It's going to be a physical game and it's going to be four quarters long."

**On if he knew Raiders CB Casey Hayward Jr. prior to joining the NFL:**

"No, I didn't know Casey Hayward."

**On what he's anticipating from playing in his first Monday Night Football game:**

"This is my first Monday Night game, so it's different. But each week I'm preparing the same way. The preparation is the same, it's just a different stage. We have to go out there, execute, and play our game. Compete, that's what we have to do, every week."

**On the Raiders receiving core:**

"They're a great group. They have great receivers. [WR] Henry Ruggs III, [WR] Bryan Edwards, [WR Hunter] Renfrow. They have a lot of great guys and a great quarterback in Derek Carr. They have a great receiving core, and we just have to go out there and compete."

**On if he played against any of the Raiders roster while attending Florida State University:**

"I played against [WR Hunter] Renfrow my freshman year. [Clemson] beat us badly, but we played them."

**CENTER COREY LINSLEY****On the energy within the offensive line:**

"It's coming [along] really well. It's been a pleasure to work with [G] Matt [Feiler] and [G] Oday [Aboushi] inside. I feel like we have great communication up there. What I've said before about adjusting; making in-game adjustments, making inter-week adjustments to things we may not have seen earlier in the week. Something new comes up that we didn't notice. All that's been great. [T] Storm [Norton] stepped up to the plate in a huge way, which has been awesome. I feel like we have gotten better each week, but the good teams are getting better each week. It's good, it's comforting, but it's what you're supposed to be doing. This week has to be better than last week, and we have to keep moving."

**On T Storm Norton:**

"A lot of stuff goes on that the average person doesn't see. I'm sure Storm is sitting there saying, 'I wish I could've done things better.' There were things I wish I could've done better in the second game and first game. Everybody has plays that they could've had better. But I feel like we're all growing together. We're all getting better together. I feel like there were things that we did to help Storm out that we all did. We all communicated better; our operation was better. We can improve on that this week as well. But beyond all that, Storm is the kind of guy that'll show up, put his head down, and go to work. He doesn't really care about outside noise; he doesn't care about anything other than getting better and being one of the guys. That's held true from day one when I met him. Never blink with Storm, he's a great guy, a great player, and we're looking forward to continuing to grow with him in there."

**On his relationship between himself and QB Justin Herbert:**

"It's been great to see that growth. There's been things I need to do better. I go up to him and say, 'Hey, what can I do in regard to this?' And he's done the same thing. I feel like that's paid off, being able to talk with him. Him listening to us, our needs, his O-line; us obviously listening to him — 24/7. The communication because he's such a great guy. He puts the team first, he's very unselfish in general. That type of quarterback has been great for us O-linemen and we have to continue to improve, continue to get better each week."

**On what's surprised him about Herbert:**

"Some things I've noticed about him that maybe I didn't notice in spring, because it wasn't game time, is he's an extremely hard worker. He's going to do everything he can to outwork everybody — he's going to put that first. He's very intelligent — all the props that everybody gives him are all true. And he's extremely talented, which everybody can see. He's a complete player. It's been an honor to work with him thus far, and it's on me, on us, to keep improving. Keep that communication going, keep that flow going of our O-line and him."

**On the difference between Herbert and Packers QB Aaron Rogers:**

"I can't compare the two. Aaron's in his 20th year, and like 45-years-old; he's been doing this for a long time. Just speaking on Justin, personally, the biggest thing with him is the communication. He has all your typical quarterback traits where he comes in the huddle, takes command of it. And that's fine, but there are nuances to the game that he has to deal with — that we all have to deal with. Because he's [Herbert] such a calm, level-headed guy, and because he works so hard and takes care of his business during the week, the adjustments we have to make, whether it's in the game or during the week, we're able to make them. Because he's not sitting there freaking out about something, or putting too much pressure on something else. He's a good guy. I feel like that helps out or offensive operation as a whole. And there's things that we can do better. We had another illegal motion penalty on Sunday. That's something we can get better at. We have to continue to improve on it, and that's on everybody. That's on me, that's on Justin, that's on the guy that happened to. We'll keep working."

**On T Rashawn Slater:**

"I'm not surprised at all, Rashawn's another great guy. He works his butt off, doesn't really say too much, he came in here humble. He's just done everything he can to work. You see him working on the sidelines, working pre-practice on his football and hand placement. That's the type of little thing that's going to carry a long way. The way he's set his foundation like that is phenomenal. He has a bright future."

**On what stands out to him about Slater:**

"The stuff that's impressed me is — yes, he's a top-ten pick, first round talent — but the part I feel like is the biggest part I can compliment him on is how he handles himself off the field."

**On the Raiders defensive line:**

"They're very talented, they have some speedy guys on the edge. They have power, strength, big dudes in the middle. They play hard, they play fast. They're not a very complicated system, but they do what they do well. We're going to have to prepare for them just like we prepare for everybody else. Everybody's good in the NFL, and they're up there. They're 3-0 for a reason. It'll be a challenge for us just like it is every week, and we have to bring it."