

POSTGAME TRANSCRIPTS

Los Angeles Chargers vs. Dallas Cowboys

Monday, October 16, 2023 ⚡ SoFi Stadium ⚡ Inglewood, Calif.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the Cowboys' defensive front:

"They have a really good front. It's widely documented. They are one of the top pass-rush units in the league. I think that our inability to run the football allowed their rush to really express itself. They were able to play their type of game most of the game. They have a lot of good rushers, so there's going to be pressure. We have to do a better job of running the football."

On developing the run game:

"We have to take a hard look at what we're doing. It takes all 11 people. It's not just on one unit — it's not just the O-line — it's the tight ends, the backs, the wideouts and the quarterback. We have to be more effective in that phase, if you're going to play high-level offense against a pass rush like that."

On the defense and penalties:

"I thought that our defense really competed well in the game. The throw to [Cowboys RB Tony] Pollard was one of those fluke plays off of a scramble, where we have him. Give credit to [Cowboys QB] Dak [Prescott], he made a big play there. Obviously, we were in a really good coverage on the penalty, we had them very well covered. That's just a tough one. I'll have to take a look at the tape on that one. We were in a five-man rush when [Prescott] rolled to his right and hit [Cowboys WR] CeeDee [Lamb]. I thought that we were really good, most of the night, on third down. I thought that we pressured the quarterback at a high level. Dak [Prescott] made a couple of plays on that last drive and it hurt us."

On if QB Justin Herbert's hand 'impacted him at all' in the game:

"No, it had more to do with the Cowboys."

On improving defensively on third down:

"We're one of the top third-down teams in the NFL and we rushed really well tonight and we covered really well tonight. They made a couple of plays, but I wouldn't change any of the calls. We were in really good defenses for the matchups that they have at receiver, and, obviously, against a mobile quarterback — we rushed five on one of them. We just didn't make the plays down the stretch to win on defense."

On 'where things started to change' following the opening-drive touchdown:

"I don't think that we ran the football very well at all today. Then, there was a lot of pressure on the quarterback. You lose momentum when their rush kind of comes alive. That's the strength of their team. I think that they were able to get the momentum back in the game when their rush kind of came alive."

On 'where the run game is at currently':

"We're a work-in-progress. This was a tough night against a good team, a good defensive unit. But, we definitely did not play well enough at the line of scrimmage and we have to improve."

On Herbert's performance:

"We were driving to win the game at the end of the game. That's a really good football team over there. They've won 12 games the last two seasons and have gone deep into the playoffs. It was a high-level game between two teams that are really, really good. So I just think that we have to play the game a little bit more on our terms and I think it starts with protecting the passer better through the run game, keepers [play-] action, making sure that those guys don't get their ears pinned back and are able to get off the rock because they have a lot of good rushers over there."

On Herbert's passes to Allen that resulted in incompletions:

"He missed [WR] Keenan [Allen] on the double-move, but that's just part of ball. He definitely gave us a chance to win in the game. He competed. We were right there at the end. We have to put this one behind us and get moving."

On 'addressing penalties in the coming days':

"Just watch the tape and teach our guys to play with good technique. That's why people fouled, because of technique."

On the run defense:

"I thought that we were really, really good all night. I thought that, defensively, we played well enough to win. We were really good all night on [Tony] Pollard. I think that he had two yards per carry. Without Dak's scramble yards there, you're talking about a high-level performance. I thought that we rushed well and I thought that we were contested the entire night. I thought that we played well in the redzone. We have to put this one behind us, because it was a tough game, and we have to get moving to Kansas City."

On if 'any part of him is frustrated to not get a complementary game':

"I think our offense gave us a chance. This was just a really tough game. It was 20 to 17 between two really good teams. When you have two teams like this, that have that much talent on the field, it's going to be really close. I think we can learn from how we played it in the finish of that game, in order to close it out. But, I think that there was a lot there from quarters one to three that we can do a lot better, so that we don't put ourselves in that position."

On S Derwin James Jr. and if he is 'concerned' with James Jr. 'potentially getting a reputation' for his penalties:

"What I know is that we can't have 30 yards — two defensive penalties — like that because it's worth a lot of yardage and it keeps drives alive. We have to keep educating, which we do, and we have to make sure that we're penalty-free because there's a lot at stake when you make penalties like that."

On Prescott's zone-read touchdown, from the defense's perspective:

"Kind of a miscommunication between the edge player and the second level."

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On the pressure from Dallas:

"They've got a really good front seven. I thought our offensive line battled and they did a great job upfront. Unfortunately, we fell short. I have to make more plays as a quarterback."

On the rushing offense:

"Like I said, they have a really good front seven. We knew we had to do our best and it didn't go our way on the ground today. I think it's just a testament to how well they played. I think we can do a lot better on offense. Especially at quarterback, I can play a lot better. I thought the defense came up with some big stops today. Held them when we needed them to. It's on us as an offense."

On his performance:

"I missed a couple receivers. Threw some bad passes. There was a lot left out there. There's a lot to work on and a lot to improve on."

On the interception:

"I threw it and the guy picked it off. He made a good play on it."

On whether the missed opportunities feel 'encouraging' or a feeling of 'we should have been better' for the offense:

"It's a little bit of both. [WR] Keenan [Allen] ran two great routes and I missed him. That's on me as a quarterback. We have those explosive opportunities and we have to capitalize on those. That's a really good defense that we're going up against. I can't miss those like that and expect to continue get back on third down and get back on track on second down. Tough opportunities. We'll watch the film and be critical on ourselves. We're learn from it."

On if he felt rushed when passing:

"Even if I was, that's on me to be able to calm my feet down, stay good in the pocket and hand deliver that strike. [WR] Keenan [Allen] ran two great routes and he gave us those opportunities to get those explosive plays. That's on me to stand in there, deliver and do my job to get him the ball."

On the offensive performance:

"It's tough as an offense to be able to convert on those third-and-longs, especially when we're getting back with the chains. I thought our guys battled really well today. I thought those receivers made plays. The offensive line was going up against a really good front seven and they battled all day. They gave me plenty of time to be able to get the ball off. I feel horrible for the guys for the way the game went. We'll have to be better. We'll learn from it."

On his finger:

"I thought our training staff did a great job of preparing me and getting me ready to play. I felt safe going out there. Being able to take those hits, covering the ball and being safe with the ball. It really didn't cross my mind too much."

On if he 'manipulated falls to protect his finger':

"I didn't really think too much about it. I think maybe it was a guarding mechanism. It had plenty of padding on it. I felt like I was safe out there to go out and play football."

On low scoring games:

"I think it's our job as an offense to be able to score more points and put up points. When our defense is playing as well as they are, we have to capitalize on those turnovers, capitalize on the field position. It's on us as an offense."

On WR Quentin Johnson:

"He's a special player and he's a talented guy. We felt like we had a good game plan going into it today. Unfortunately, I didn't get him the ball enough today, that's on me. We'll be able to look at the film and talk about, 'Hey where are our opportunities to get him the ball, get him out in space.' He's a talented player. That's something that we'll address."

On RB Austin Ekeler:

"Ek is a special player. Anytime you get him out on the field it's better for our offense. To miss a guy like that for a couple weeks and to have him back means a ton for our offense."

DALLAS COWBOYS HEAD COACH MIKE McCARTHY

On his message to the team following the game:

"We reiterated what we talked about today in the team meeting. We didn't say much in the week, we felt like we've done enough talking this week. They've been quiet, they worked hard. They did a good job on the misses. It was a bumpy night with 20 penalties and the up and downness. I just love their resilience and fight, and we came out on top."

On the Cowboys' 'resilience':

"I think this is part of the definition of a complementary football team – the offense picks up the defense, and the defense picks up for your offense, and special teams all the way around. There were plays that needed to be made, especially down the stretch. It was a bumpy game out there. 20 penalties called. A lot of back and forth. A lot of resetting your jaw and just keep fighting. I thought our men did a really good job there."

On the offense:

"I'll tell you, we have a lot of respect for the pass rush. We had some things inside that we didn't get going as well as we would have liked. We're getting there. They threw a defense at us tonight. You play a team that's coming out of the bye week, that's to be expected. I thought our guys handled it and saw a lot of pressure there in the first half, empty pressure and man, on top of the things that [Staley] normally plays. It's a good win, a good road win. We've had four in a row in six games, we split, we're 4-2, we're at the bye. It's been a little bit of a rollercoaster ride, as far as how we have performed and our productivity in six weeks. We get a chance to reset, reboot. Hopefully, we come out of the game relatively healthy, and then get back at it with the Rams. Continuity and consistency is at the forefront of everything we've been focused on. Not to be Negative Nelly after a win, but the pre-snap penalties, it's a reoccurring issue on the road. The four road games, they have all been a problem. We have to get better there. We have to resolve that because it's holding us back. The competitive penalties, we have to work through and coach through it and keep working."

On Cowboys QB Dak Prescott's rushing ability:

"I think if you just look at the design of their defense, their edge rushers are extremely wide. Going into how some of the things we want to do inside was to focus on trying to keep those big gaps open. He did a good job of taking that trust in his feet, coming out there, extending plays well above the two to three-second mark. It was obviously needed, but that's part of the issue: play with three or four wide rushers, and this is quite as wide as we've seen all year, so it limits him here, to do some things to get him out on the edge. Stepping up, up, and out, and he did a nice job of it tonight."

On the defense's performance on the final drive:

"That's how we feel we're built, our pass rush and big players make big plays and are part of these types of games, so, hopefully, we're in that position every week, or our pass rushers are up to the forefront of the challenge."

On Cowboys WR Brandin Cooks:

"Brandin [Cooks] is the ultimate pro. He's the same man every day and he's a joy to work with. Extremely coachable, has vast experience in different systems. He's excellent because he knows his place, so it doesn't surprise me that he's made that statement because that's the way he comes to work every day. He's very consistent. In practice, it's a lead that we need to follow because we need to be more consistent. We're going to get our continuity, that's a focus for us moving forward."

On the offense's performance:

"We did enough to win. There are some things we did very well. Every game is different. It was a whole different challenge today, but I thought we played well enough today."

On Cowboys LB Markquese Bell:

"Great job. Clearly, you're going to see what we see every day, which is a young man that came off the special teams but is super competitive is a natural, particularly in the subgroups. I just love his tenacity and confidence in one player."

On the muffed punt:

"I think the biggest thing is JT [Cowboys WR Jalen Tolbert] thought that [Cowboys WR KaVontae] Turpin touched the ball on the collision, so he was the first touch and it was pretty clear on the review. They put it up on the jumbotron, using favor to the home team."

On the decision to kick a field goal at the end of the first half rather than go for a touchdown:

"I think at the end of the half, you look at the series going down there. You get into those spots and you always have two play calls and anticipating the threshold for us was seven seconds, as in something as far as determining which way we were going in that situation down-and-distance and stuff like that. I think we were right at the eight, somewhere in there. We just decided to play it safe instead of the other call, would be throw it into the endzone and give us a shot there. I just felt the way the game was going, I think we had a holding penalty early on in the series, so just wanted to make sure we got some points on the board."

On Chargers Offensive Coordinator Kellen Moore:

"Kellen [Moore] is very well-respected throughout our organization when he was here as a player and a coach. He left, he has a newborn and he's doing a great job here."

On Moore 'on the other sideline':

"I think if you're fortunate enough to be in the league long enough, you've experienced these types of situations."

On the defense 'playing with their backs against the wall:

"It takes a tremendous amount of grit. We bottled them up there in the second half, we had those long drives and we combined for three and outs, so that's tenacity."

On Cowboys K Brandon Aubrey:

"He can crush it. He is so consistent. I enjoy watching him work. He's off to a great start. I don't know if I've seen a start like this in my time. What a kicker."

On determining distances and times of when to utilize Aubrey:

"I think that those decisions are made before the game. You, obviously, have to be in-tune with the ebbs and flows from the game. You have marks. He gives us the benefit of trying the long ones when we have to. We played it pretty true to the numbers."

On Philadelphia and San Francisco losing yesterday:

"It's a good weekend [laughter]. Crazy weekend in the NFL, but we were on the right side of this week. You know how fast that can turn. If you really stay focused on yourself and don't look outside of yourself, just watch what's going on in your division, that's about as far as I go."

On continued about losses around the league yesterday:

"I apologize, I'm not your drama content guy [laughter]. I wish that I had a great story. I think that most of our guys slept on the plane."

On Pollard's long reception:

"That was a big third-down conversion. That just shows what Tony [Pollard] is all about. Tony is just a big play waiting to happen. I think it's something that we continue to look at and try to give him opportunities and space. That's a great example of playing above the 2.3, and that starts with Dak [Prescott]."

DALLAS COWBOYS QUARTERBACK DAK PRESCOTT

On the win:

“It was big. Obviously, just coming off of the performance last week, just wanted to respond. Ask anybody in the locker room, this game couldn't come fast enough. We just want to get that taste out of our mouth and move forward. That's what our message really was this week, just about moving forward, learning from what from what happened in the past but putting forth our best effort. It was a great team win. We went out there and we played. We knew going into this, very explosive, fundamental on all aspects. A huge win, especially going into the bye-week. 4-2, everything in front of us.”

On displaying ‘team resilience’:

“That's exactly what today was, especially after following last week and getting down early in the game. Feeling some adversity with the guys, everybody responding, just buckling up and trusting everything that we've preached, everything that we put into this. Trust in our brotherhood and then fight to the end. I have make that throw to get the touchdown right there at the end. I got pissed off about that. Our defense makes a play. That's what it's about, having each other's backs.”

On rushing the ball and ‘utilizing his legs’:

“It's how the game unfolded. A little bit of, maybe, a conscious effort by myself. Just coming off of last week, realizing that maybe that's something I could use, we could use in this sense. Then, obviously, those guys had some great coverage. [Cowboys Head Coach] Mike [McCarthy] is always preaching about the 2.3 [seconds to throw]. The guys did a great job of coming up and after staying alive, offensive line keeping their bodies on someone to give me a chance to get out in different lanes. Kind of half-planned, but I think it's something beneficial.”

On ‘getting passes off’ and if he was ‘close to getting sacked’ on the long completion to Cowboys RB Tony Pollard:

“I don't know if I was about to get sacked there. I don't know if anybody touched me. Just reacting, just playing and reacting I guess, but you have a sense. That's a resilient play there. Honestly, especially if you don't, I mean I broke out of the top of there and Tony [Pollard] doing a great job of getting open and finding a window. As I got out, I saw some grass in front of me to potentially run, but always just trying to keep my eyes downfield, looking for a tight end or receiver coming across. Then, here comes Tony out of the backfield and threw it to him. Then, he got a lot more than the play that I made. He almost scored. I guarantee if he realizes there's a guy to the right that he does score.”

On utilizing Cowboys WRs Brandin Cooks and CeeDee Lamb:

“That was part of the plan. I talked about what was part of the plan going into this game, knowing that we'd get some matchups with those guys, understanding how they're going to play CeeDee [Lamb], clouding his side, when they were going to give in to [Brandin] Cooks outside some one-one-ones, and we took advantage of them. Cooks did a great job. Tonight was due – the player that he's been, the person that he's been, everything that he brings to this team, getting the touchdown, big third-down catches, plays that he made all over the field. He was due for a night like this. Happy for him. It will only grow for him.”

On his touchdown run:

“Just off of a run play, we've been running a good little bit. I had CeeDee [Lamb] in motion as an option, the defensive end took T.P. (Pollard), the two other guys ran towards CeeDee, just allowed me to cut up field. Great play call, honestly, great play call. They were going all out, wasn't necessarily sound on their end. Somebody has to have the quarterback. Not showing my legs early in the year, not running, I think played a part in that.”

On building off of last week:

"Everybody was frustrated from last week, honestly. I was just as frustrated as [Lamb] was, right? Maybe it wasn't as visible. Maybe more frustrated. I tell CeeDee [Lamb] all the time, nobody is a bigger fan of his game than I am. We're on the same page. From our conversation, me and that guy put a lot of work into this thing. That's really what it just talked about, understanding what we put into this. Those games are going to happen. Unfortunately, you don't want them to happen — damn sure don't want them happening in the way that they panned out like that. But, then, there are going to be games that the team says, 'Hey, if you have to beat us, you are going to do it without CeeDee,' and he has to be there to make all of the assists and do all of the other plays and the dirty plays. That was part of our communication. When they give him opportunities like they did tonight, he's going to take advantage of them and I'm going to take advantage of them. I told you all before, he's one hell of a player and one of the best that I've ever been around."

On their first game 'decided by less than 12 points':

"This is huge. That's actually what I told the offense when we were taking that kneel down there on that first kneel down. These are the games that we're going to be in. We've had some blowouts, and then we had some games that didn't go our way that were maybe a little over a score, and then one lopsided. We haven't had close games, but this is what the NFL is about. That's all I said is we have to get used to this, we have to stay confident in this, understand that these close games — one-score, field-goal games, touchdown games — we have to believe in ourselves, finishing it on our terms with the ball in our hands. Thankful for our defense right there, getting us that ball, getting that turnover. We were able to do that. But, that's the NFL. That's what the NFL is about; close games, winning the game at the end. Credit to everybody that played a part in this one."

On the incomplete pass intended for Pollard in the endzone and Cowboys CB Stephon Gilmore's 'game-sealing' interception:

"As I said, I was pissed. I wanted to, I know that I can, I should — trust me, I won't sleep over one throw tonight, and that's that one right there at the end of the game to Tony [Pollard] in the endzone. But, if you have to go sit on the sideline, at least we got a field goal and we took the lead. Then, to watch a guy like [Cowboys LB] Micah [Parsons] show up, that's what great players do — show up in big-time moments. First sack of the game, hadn't had one all game, but there he goes and here he comes. It was an important time, he got the sack. Right there, next, Defensive Player of the Year, veteran, a guy that's a leader of this team, gets the game-sealing interception. Talk about guys just doing the right thing, staying at it and staying consistent. Guys really picking up and just being there for one another, and that's what the defense did for me in that moment, did for the team in that moment of getting that turnover. That was that."

On Cowboys WR Brandin Cooks:

"I talked about it in the sense that this was a game that was huge for Brandin [Cooks] in the sense of he has done everything right from the moment that he showed up in the spring — being a consistent leader, leading other guys on the field, off the field and just doing everything right and everything that we've asked him to do in between the lines. Hasn't really reaped the rewards, I guess you can say, of the work that he's put in throughout early in the season, whether it be targets, catches, or whatever, but tonight, some big plays, some big third-down conversions, the touchdown there. The guy showed up and that's what he'll continue to do. Tonight is just a big step in who he is going to be for the rest of the year. Thankful that we have this guy on our team and glad he had the night that he had. Proud of him and happy for him."

On entering the bye week with a win and his pregame conversation with Chargers Offensive Coordinator Kellen Moore:

"Huge to go into the bye week with momentum. I just said it to somebody in the locker room, I said, 'Now, I can enjoy the bye week.' That is what it is about. 4-2, we're a little over a quarter into the season. Puts us right where we want to be. Got this big win on the road. Can build off of this one, give us confidence coming out of the bye week to continue to stack and just get better as a team and chase every goal that we have in front of us. To catch up with Kellen [Moore] was great. It had nothing to do with football in the brief time that we said, 'What's up?' Shared some family news between one another. Great to see the guy, to see him smile and see him happy. That's what life's about. He's a brother well beyond this game."

On the win:

"It was huge for us to get to 4-2, no doubt about it. But as I talked about our message throughout these days, we're moving forward and running our race, honestly. You've got to show up week in and week out in this league. If you look back at this past weekend, obviously, that shows you that. The last thing that we can do is start watching other teams and start you know, 'If they do this, if they do that, when we do this,' like, one, it's too early, and two, at the end of the day, we have to go win games, and we have to win games when it's available or when we are available to do that. Obviously, as it gets to the latter part of the year, it'll show a playoff picture, but we have to focus on getting better, peaking at the right time, being the best versions of ourselves every week that we show up and just continuing to make strides of getting better."

On if this week was a 'must-win':

"Shit yeah. It was a must-win. It was early in the season, but 4-2 and 3-3, it's a huge difference. I get exactly what you're saying, it's early in the season. I've been in a 3-5 season that we turned it around and went on a win streak and won the division, so I get what you're saying, but 4-2 and second road win of the year, against a great team with a great offense, great defense. Going into the bye week, we talked about, after last week, not allowing this thing to landslide. Obviously, I think a win like this allows you to really close that book. Obviously, we closed that book throughout this week, preparing for this game, moving on — not just talking about it, but being about it — practicing that right way and preparing the right way to do that. But when you get this win like we did, you definitely can move on. Now, we'll move forward from this one, go watch it, get better, critique it hard, see how we can get better from this game, even on a win, and then enjoy the bye week. Get healthy, enjoy the week and then stack [wins] after that."

On 'these types of wins defining a team':

"It just shows the fight. As I talked about, the brotherhood and having each other's back. So many back and forth. Obviously, it's a 17-20 game, but just back and forth, whether it be a possession, we stopped them, they stopped us, they score, we score, we score, they score, whatever it may be, of just having each other's back and being there for the other guy maybe when he's not at his best. I think you could see that, it was evident at different times on both sides, really. Credit those guys, as well. They had some big-time stops, gave their offense back a chance. Even me missing that throw right there, that offense got a chance to come on the field and win the game, tie the game, and our defense stepped up. Credit to them, credit to our defense. That's what it's about, the brotherhood that we have. That's when you can really hang your hat on the brotherhood and it's not just a word, and look back at evidence of it on film."

On 'what happened at the end of the first half' and 'getting another shot at the end zone':

"Maybe the distance that we were at. Honestly, in that time, I'm not thinking about that. I'm thinking about the next play that comes in. But, it'd be different if we were on, maybe, the five-yard line, within the 10-yard line, where it's a quick-strike to the endzone, but, then again, you don't want something crazy to happen. Obviously, different scenarios all throughout the league. We practice different scenarios in that case. We knew that they were going to play soft, they weren't going to give that up. Credit to those guys, it's not like they were going to challenge us and go one-on-one across the board and give us a favorable matchup. We put a drive together, a point-scoring drive and no problem right there with settling for three[points]. That's what we won by."

On Cowboys K Brandon Aubrey:

"He's butter. Butter [Brandon] Aubrey [*laughter*]. Smooth. Always has been since the day that he showed up. Obviously I'm a big fan of his game. Obviously, I met him and have known him for years before he became a Dallas Cowboy, one of my best friends trains him. To know his story as I said, following him when he was in the USFL, and then for us to take a chance on him and then bring him in when we had another kicker in the preseason and just watch him kick. He's an athlete, man. He's an athlete playing kicker. He's been a professional. He's been a professional in soccer and has been a professional in another football league. Then, now to be here in the NFL, yeah, he's mature as hell. Just butter with it, smooth. No surprise."

On the 'tush push':

"They didn't push my tush enough [*laughter*]. No, just didn't get it, honestly. Just didn't get it. Wish that we did, obviously, that would have turned into more points. Let's get a new name for that."