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Chargers Head Coach Brandon Staley

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On if QB Justin Herbert was ‘out of sync’ yesterday:

“Yesterday, I think that he was just a touch off, nothing more than that. From a timing standpoint, just a little bit off from that normal rhythm and timing that he has kind of established through the first five games. Days like that happen in the NFL. I thought that his decision-making was good. He was going in the right places with the football, which I think that’s one thing that you’re looking for; what’s his decision-making process? I think that he was just a touch off with some of those throws. Then, when the game turns into the game that it kind of turned into, it just puts a lot of pressure on you, as a quarterback, when you’re trying to mount a comeback like that. Your margin for error isn’t quite as big. The pockets are tighter. The coverages are tougher. The pressure systems are tougher. We had to unpack a lot of those really designer defenses as that game went on because of playing from behind. I felt like he hung tough. He didn’t have his best stuff, but I definitely was proud of the way that he competed in the game. He gave us a chance.”

On the Ravens displaying defensive looks that the offense has yet to see this season:

“There is always that game within the game. In every game, a team is going to have something in their gameplan that is specific to the opponent. Not everything that is in the plan is something that you’ve seen. I think that’s just part of the NFL, the un-scouted looks. How is this team assessing you? I think that’s something that you’re always trying to look at early in the game. Are they going to play sub [-package] defense to bigger [offensive skill position] groupings? Are they going to match personnel? What types of coverages are they going to play? Are they going to try and help a corner? Going into the game, I felt like we definitely knew the identity of Baltimore, but I think you just give credit to Wink [Ravens Defensive Coordinator Don Martindale] and his staff. They had a good gameplan. More than anything, they got a 14-point lead and were able to play the game more on their terms. What that allows the defense to do is play a lot more designer coverage systems that maybe you don’t get to see in other games, because it’s an even game, or maybe they’re behind. I think that a lot of those pressure systems, particularly some of those six DB groupings — hybrid rush packages where there are a lot of different jersey numbers in the game — some of those come to life. That’s part of the NFL when you get behind. We have to do a better job starting the game on defense. Then, offensively, on early downs, first and second down, making sure that we don’t get into those — I think that we had 11 third downs of more than five [yards] yesterday. It’s tough, on the road, when you have that many third downs of more than five [yards] in a stadium that’s loud and against a defense like that.”

On what he learned about yesterday’s game:

“A lot, as a coach. Going into that game, from a matchup standpoint on special teams, I think that’s an outstanding special teams football team. Their kicker and punter are outstanding — [P Sam] Koch and [K Justin] Tucker. Their coverage units, I think that we have to do a good job of matching personnel. They’re a big team. They’re not like Kansas City — Kansas City has a lot of speed on the field — Baltimore has bigger bodies. We feel like we have to match personnel better on special teams because we lost a lot of field position yesterday in the return game. They’re a tough team to play when you’re behind, whether it’s your defense or offense, on a short field or long field, depending on how you want to look at it. We have to matchup better on teams, for sure. Then, on defense, I liked our plan, how we assessed that team. I really do. But, I think that we need to start a little bit faster. I thought that there were a couple of plays that we could make in those first two series. We forced them to drive it, but I felt like there were a couple of plays that we could have made to get us off of the field. We got the takeaways in the game, but we missed out on [S] Derwin’s [James Jr.] strip.

I felt like it was one of those game-changing plays to flip the momentum. If we would have just recovered that fumble, or just made another game-changing play against that team, because holding that team to 320 [total yards] with 38 minutes of possession, I was proud of the way that we competed in the game on defense. Then, on offense, we have to do a better job on first and second down. Our first and second down plan going into that game — that's a tough team to play against when you're behind, and then behind the sticks. Just being a little bit more aggressive on early downs to get ourselves in better situations. There is so much to learn from. Like I said, Baltimore did a really good job of coaching yesterday. [Ravens Head Coach] John [Harbaugh] and that staff, they do a really good job. They had their team ready to play."

On the performance of the linebackers yesterday:

"I was really proud of [LBs] Amen [Ogbongbemiga] and Nick Niemann in the game. For their first action, to go against a rushing attack that prolific, and how they rush the football — what makes those guys so challenging to defend is that you have triple-option on every snap. You have to defend all 11 guys in the game. There are a lot of different groupings in the game. They can play power football, they can play option football, they can play spread-out football. You have to be on it, as a second-level player, and I felt like those guys really acquitted themselves well in the game. That's what we like about them; they're calm, they can see. I thought that they were definitely a bright spot for us. I think that there's, obviously, a lot that they can do better, but I felt like they held their own in that game. I think that they're going to learn a lot from the tape. There's a lot to learn from. That game is like an NFL teaching session because there's a lot that you can apply for the rest of the season. They challenge all of your rules, from a run-support standpoint, from a run fits standpoint, so you can really teach your defense at a high level off of that film. We're going to get a chance to do that with the young guys like that."

On the defending the run:

"I really felt like we took a step forward yesterday. If you take away [Ravens QB] Lamar's [Jackson] 22-yard scramble — and there was a jet sweep that you can put on me — outside of that, I feel like we kind of got unlucky on one of those bounce runs with [Ravens RB Devonta] Freeman. [S] Alohi [Gilman] was kind of unblocked. Derwin [James Jr.] came inside — [LB] Kyzir [White] and Alohi were both kind of there, but it was one of those where you just get unlucky. It was a 16-yard run. But it's just a really prolific rushing attack. I felt like, with our physicality, we did take a step forward with our front and our edges. It's not where we want it to be yet, but I felt like we definitely improved — definitely from the Cleveland game, for sure. Sometimes you can learn the opposite side of it. We had a tough day, 34-6, but there are a lot of lessons, I think, that we can take away — and that we just got done talking about — that are going to help us moving forward because that's as good of a rushing attack that you're going to find because of how they rush the ball. We're improving there. Hopefully, we get some guys healthy with J.J. [DL Justin Jones] coming back, [LB Drue] Tranquill, [LB Kenneth] Murray [Jr.], Nas [S Nasir Adderley]. Hopefully, we can come back after the bye and take even more steps forward."

On saying that the team was 'outplayed and outcoached' following yesterday's game:

"Early in the game, when you're on the road, what we talked about was getting off to a good start with a high level of execution. The energy in the stadium is palpable when you're on the road and it's about making sure you max that energy and have a high level of execution early in the game. What happened was we were a little bit off with our execution early in the game, specifically offensively. When you start out with three punts and an interception, you don't get off to a good start. We weren't able to impact the game defensively, early, with a takeaway, with a three and out. And in special teams, we weren't able to turn the tide there to get our offense going. I felt like in all three phases, we didn't start very well. That first quarter-and-a-half, we weren't playing well, in all three phases, as well as we're capable of. Once we got settled down on defense, we had some good things happen for us. You can't wait that long against a team that's as good as they are, with a quarterback like that. Early in the game, our execution has to be better. I felt like our plan for success needs to be better on the road like that to give our guys the better chance to be successful."

On the defense containing Ravens QB Lamar Jackson:

“I’m really proud of how we played guys in the passing game. You heard me talking about putting a roof over the coverages, and they were trying to throw deep. If you watch the film, they had a bunch of designer shots to go deep in the game. He was coming off a game where he threw for 450 [yards] — and I think everyone’s discovering that Lamar is as good of a passer as there is in the NFL. This guy has gotten better every year as a passer. He’s a true double-threat. He’s one of the best players in the league. I felt like we did a really good job in pass coverage and taking away their designer stuff yesterday. I was really impressed with the way our secondary and linebackers played in the deep part of the field. And our rush plan was able to pressure him when it was a known pass. We did a nice job in the pass rush versus them. Again, the one I was disappointed in was when we had them at first-and-20. We had the coverage matched extremely well and he was able to scramble for the 22-yard run. That’s one I was bummed about, disappointed about. But, that’s going to happen against players like him, you just have to keep it moving. That team is really impossible to defend if you’re getting lit up in the passing game. It’s hard enough to defend them in the running game, but if they’re throwing the football at a high level, you’re going to get lit up. That didn’t happen yesterday. We were on the field for 38 minutes, but we only gave up 320 yards. We had two takeaways — almost three. Had the game started differently, I would’ve been more pleased with how we played defensively.”

On the run game:

“I always talk to [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] about staying patient. When it becomes a three-possession game, we went for it and held them. I was really proud of how our defense responded to two sudden changes. But, when it becomes a 17-nothing game, it affects your plan. I felt like we had some good runs up in the plan, and on the tape, there were some good examples of that, but not nearly enough. When you get behind, it’s a long way back when it’s 17-nothing, 24-6. For you to be able to come back, you need to push it down the field and throw the football. That’s what I’m talking about playing better as a team so that it doesn’t get out of balance that way. It’s hard to come all the way back against a team like that when you’re having to throw the football that much. Hopefully, our team learns a lot from that.”

On the bye week:

“Our approach is similar, in terms of unpacking the game, telling the truth of what happened. I think that for me, this six-game stretch has been a really tough stretch. Our guys have earned a break. I know we didn’t get to the bye feeling like we played our best ball, and it’s tough no matter how you lose. Whether it’s close or how it was yesterday, it’s always going to be tough. What our team has done is they’ve always responded, no matter how the game’s unfolded. Whether it’s win, lose, what type of win, what type of loss, I felt like our approach has remained consistent. That’s what you’re hoping for as a coach, that the approach is consistent no matter what. Now, we get a bye week to really asses what’s going on. Our players are going to get away from football for a little bit and be with their families, take care of themselves. Then, be ready to come back fresh and ready to compete against New England. I think this bye’s coming at a good time for us; we’ve had a really tough six-game stretch. We’re going to attack it accordingly”

On ‘self-scouting’ over the bye week:

“I believe in assessment of the Chargers. That’s really important because a lot of people would say, ‘Hey, we’re on to New England. Let’s just get to that.’ We’re going to spend the next three days as coaches — today, and Tuesday, Wednesday — really looking at our position groups. Number one, taking a look at the after-action report from the first six games. What we did well, what haven’t we done well, let’s look at our personnel. Is this guy in the right role? Where do we think we can go with this in the second half of the season? Acquisitions, stuff like that. We start with the position group, then the unit. This isn’t earthshattering to the NFL, people do this. I think it’s important that we study the Chargers before we start on the New England. Situationally, first and second down. Personnel grouping, run-pass, third down, red area. All these field zones, two minute. That assessment process, what it can do is it can allow you to see what your tendencies are. How productive have we been? Our EPA [expected points added], maybe we can learn some stuff about where our deficiencies are, or proficiencies. However you want to look at it. When you really study it in that focused way, you can also asses how we’re using the personnel. Where do we need to go from a personnel standpoint? Is this guy doing the right job? Is there more potential or do we need to scale back? Those are all critical things when you’re talking about moving forward as a team. We’re going to be really critical about sports performance, too — how we’re training these guys, how we’re practicing. After the bye, where do we need to go? I think that’s really important as you move forward. It’s not just business as usual. You’re trying to get better, and we’re certainly going to try and take the next three days and get better as a team.”

On the trade deadline:

"It's an ongoing responsibility. As a coach and in personnel, with [General Manager] Tom [Telesco] and the Spanos Family, you're always trying to give your team the best chance to win, short-term and long-term. There's that balance that you certainly have to strike, but we want to make sure we are exploring any avenue, if there is one. If there isn't? That's okay, too. Then you have to look from within; 'Hey, how do we maximize the team that we have?' I think that's something that we're going to do over the next however many days and weeks before the deadline, making sure we're looking at all the avenues that we can to make our team as good as it can be. That's the responsibility we need to have for our team."

On 'early-down efficiency':

"I think that because we're so effective on third down, it puts a stronger lens to that first and second down. It sways your view like, 'Hey, man it's not going well.' I don't look at it that way. But, there is truth that we can be better here. That has to do with is being more aggressive on first and second down, aggressive in terms of being ahead of third down. What are these plays? Is it working with pace? What's the right grouping that can get us an easy completion? What's the right grouping to unpack a run? Where can we simplify the defense so we can take advantage of the rules? There are a lot of ways to do that, and I think what we learned yesterday is that it's really tough to be a third-down team against the best defenses that you play. Wink Martindale is a really good coordinator. That's a really good defense we played. I don't care what the stats are, this guy has been in the top three or four every year he's been the coordinator there. They're finding their way, just like we are. What we have to do on early downs is make sure that we're maximizing our playmakers and staying out of those tough scenarios that we've been able to convert. You can't take that all away from our offense. Third downs are a part of the NFL. But, you don't want to live like that because it puts too much pressure. There are too many variables in the defense's favor on the third down. We don't want to do that, and I think over the next few days, we're going to take a hard look at our operation so that we can be more prolific on first and second down moving forward."

On the Ravens' defensive plan:

"The coverage systems they played and the coverages they played with their pressure weren't any different. How they expressed it, from a grouping standpoint, was a little bit different. It's not like we've never seen it, but what [Martindale] does a good job of is they have a lot of jerseys that can look similar. They can play a lot of linebackers, they can play a lot of edge defenders, they can bring in [Ravens DE Odafe] Oweh, [Ravens DE Justin] Houston and [Ravens LB] Tyus Bowser. Then, the known rushers with [Ravens DE] Calais Campbell. They have a bunch of DBs that they can play around the line of scrimmage. There are a bunch of hybrid inside linebackers that they can play — [Ravens LBs] Malik Harrison, Patrick Queen, Josh Bynes. Now, there's all these people that are in different places, and it just adds another layer to the quarterback. Then, they are playing tight coverage outside. Now, the clock is ticking on you. You have to tip your cap to them for having a good plan. I felt like we had a good third-down plan. The level of execution required for you when you have 11 third downs of five or more [yards to go], it just requires a lot of you. That's a tall task. Defensively, we can't get behind 14-0. In the kicking game, we can't ask [QB] Justin [Herbert] to go 84 yards because the ball is on the 16-yard line because we have a bad return and now the crowd is going crazy. It's a team operation. That's my takeaway from the game: we have to play better in all three phases so that Justin can perform at his best."