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Chargers Week 10 Media Availability

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OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR JOE LOMBARDI

On RB Austin Ekeler:

“I think that he’s stronger than you think for his size. Good feel, smart player. He had never heard of [Pro Football Hall of Fame RB] Paul Hornung — I remember my grandfather saying that Paul Hornung was a good back — but when he got inside the 20 [yard line], he was the best back in the NFL. Something comes alive in that guy when he gets inside the 20. He’s just an all-around good player.”

On ‘what goes into’ Ekeler’s ability to score in the redzone:

“I don’t know if you can put your finger on it. I told him that he didn’t have to wait until we were inside the 20 [yard line] to do some of those special things. He’s a good back everywhere. It’s been fun to watch him make those plays inside the 20, for sure.”

On Ekeler’s fumble in the fourth quarter last week:

“Watching it live, I was thinking, ‘I think he’s down.’ Maybe that was wishful thinking. Obviously, it was in retrospect. Even after we got the fumble back, I was just hoping that he was down so we didn’t have to get back into field goal range. At the time, I think you’re so focused on what’s happening. The emotions that you feel now aren’t the same because you’re focused on the task at hand. In retrospect, it’s like, ‘What the heck is going on?’ At the time of the game, you’re like, ‘Alright, if we get the ball here, what are we going to call?’ All of those things. You’re kind of focused on that and not — I try to keep the emotional part of it out of it.”

On ‘if the offense was expecting man coverage in the fourth quarter play where WR Joshua Palmer caught a first down to get into field goal range’:

“We did, although they had shown something in the first two plays of the game. They had a couple of defenses that we hadn’t seen before where they were showing man, but playing zone. On that play, we had a man-zone check and I just called the play knowing that the route we had, we had options if it was zone. We weren’t expecting a big play if it’s zone. Expected more of a five, six-yard play. Earlier in that drive in that same situation, they had played man. I had a couple of play-calls we were deciding between and went with that one and got lucky that they were in man.”

On explosive plays:

“Improvement needed. Not as many as we would hope and we’re kind of relying more on efficient underneath stuff. We have taken some shots and haven’t connected on as many as we had wished.”

On how to increase explosive plays:

“There are a lot of things. We’re not an especially fast team right now. Speed obviously helps, but there are scheme things we can do to improve on that.”

On 'if injuries are a factor into now executing explosive plays':

"I think so. Obviously, [WR] Mike [Williams] makes a lot of plays down field with those jump balls. Whenever he's in there and you see those opportunities, the ball usually goes up to him. When he's not in there, it's not the same dynamic. I'd like to say that if we were 100 percent healthy, there would be a few more, but we can't know for sure."

On how the offensive operation changes with WR Keenan Allen being day-to-day:

"I think some of what he does, [WR] DeAndre [Carter] has done a really good job of replacing it. This last Sunday, he made a lot of big third-down conversions that would have been Keenan's plays if he were in there and he did a good job. Then there were some things that in our mind are probably Keenan-only plays that you don't really dabble in if you don't think he is playing. As long as you know, it's easier. When he came back, he was in there, but he was kind of picking and choosing which routes he felt good about running, and so you weren't really sure where he was going to be sometimes. That's the hard part. In-game injuries or a guy gets limited within the game. As long as you know, you can set your game plan up. It makes it easier."

On if he wants to 'wait for Allen to be healthy before having him play':

"I just want him to get healthy. Whatever that takes. The half-and-half thing, like I said earlier, it's tougher because you're not sure — every play, there are words on your call sheet, but there is a personality to them all and you want to know what personality is running the routes so that you can feel good about what you're calling."

On what he has learned about the wide receiver corps:

"I think they are a resilient group, tough. They are smart. Guys are having to make adjustments within game and play a position maybe they haven't practiced. They have done a good job with that. I'm proud of the guys that are going out there. This game is about toughness and resiliency and those guys have shown that."

On the difference in QB Justin Herbert from when he suffered the rib injury to now:

"I think just his confidence and knowing what he has. He's not limited by the injury. Obviously, that helps a lot with the quarterback's confidence. Maybe the biggest thing is just his ability to practice earlier in the week. The physical reps are more useful than the mental reps, and I think that helps his confidence when the ball kicks off."

On the 49ers' run defense:

"We're always hoping that we can run the ball well. Game flow, obviously, has a lot to do with that. It's a team that has a really good pass rush and I think they are really hoping to be able to do that. That's what they want to do, and so the more that we can keep them in a run mode and make them hit blocks and not be able to just tee off on the pass rush, the better. I think it's an important part of the game."

On which player will start at right tackle if T Trey Pipkins III cannot play on Sunday:

"We're working through that."

On if he has 'details' about which player would potentially fill-in for Pipkins at right tackle:

"No [*laughter*]. I'll leave that to [Head Coach] Brandon [Staley]. Brock will get mad at me [*laughter*]. He will yell at me when we're walking back if I give too much information there [*laughter*]."

On limiting first-quarter deficits:

“Play better and call better plays. I don’t know if there is a magic formula. You just have to get off the bus ready to go. I’m not saying that they haven’t been ready. It may just be random. It’s hard to put a finger on it and say, ‘This is why it has happened.’ The better you play early, the less that will happen and just finding a way to make that happen. I think some of it is mindset, the adjustments in practice. Is it an actual, physical thing that is going to happen. We’re getting into team periods earlier and just reinforcing that idea of like, ‘Hey, let’s go. It’s time to go and let’s be ready to play.’ As I told you before, one of my favorite books is Fooled By Randomness. It’s 17 games. It’s different than baseball where there are 400 at-bats or however many. Sometimes, the coin comes up heads four times in a row. You watch the game and it’s like, ‘Man, this drive could have kept going if ...,’ and, ‘This drive could have kept going if ...,’ and some of those drives have happened early in the game. The other offense has scored points and you find yourself in a hole. I saw that stat come up that there are three teams in NFL history that have had double-digit deficits at the end of the first quarter. Words that we have used before, toughness and resiliency of our team, that we’re 3-1 in those games.”

On RB Isaiah Spiller’s performance last week:

“Good. I thought he ran hard. He’s had a good week of practice, so I’m proud of the way that he’s done. Picked up a pressure and stoned a linebacker. I was really happy with the way he played.”

On if Spiller was ‘disappointed after tripping on a run’:

“Yeah, I’m sure he was. It’s never 100 percent, but I like his decisiveness and how hard he was hitting the hole. I thought it was a good performance for him.”

On what makes 49ers DL Nick Bosa a ‘werewolf’:

“Guys that are hard to block. His get-off, his athleticism. He’s one of the best at it. A werewolf is a guy that you always need to be aware of where he is. He’s definitely one of those defensive players that you have to game plan around.”

On playing Bosa in a night game:

“I think he is a werewolf 24 hours a day [*laughter*].”

On wide receiver placement across multiple personnel groupings:

“I think there is spacing to every play. On that play, I think DeAndre [Carter] found himself open and he hooked up too early. His landmark was off on that play. He’s a guy that has great feel and instincts, so usually when he makes a decision like that, he goes off script a little bit. It’s usually the right thing to do. That time it wasn’t and it ended up working out for us. When Justin [Herbert] threw that, I thought he was throwing it to Josh [Palmer] and I’m like, ‘Why are you throwing it so hard to that guy?’ [*Laughter*] Then, it went through and we caught it. I was like, ‘Oh, I see what happened there.’”

On if there would have been more space in that play:

“That ball came out a little bit early to go to DeAndre [Carter]. Josh [Palmer] would have been first in the progression. If I am not throwing it there, he would have come open a little bit further left. That was just DeAndre [Carter] hooking up a little early.”

DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR RENALDO HILL

On 49ers RB Christian McCaffrey:

“They’re finding ways to get him the ball in all aspects. Obviously, looking back at what he’s done — getting him out of the backfield, lining him up as a receiver, even throwing him the ball — they’re utilizing his skillset. It’s just making them even more explosive.”

On preparing for the ‘threat’ of McCaffrey and 49ers WR Deebo Samuel:

“We’re expecting all of those guys to be up, even [49ers FB Kyle] Juszczyk. We’re preparing for all of those guys to play. We’re not anticipating that they won’t be out there. It’s a lot of skill everywhere. I think that the biggest thing that we have to do is make sure that we’re just playing our scheme better. We really have to focus on ourselves this week.”

On his reaction to the 49ers acquiring McCaffrey in-season:

“You know in the back of your mind that that game was coming up. Obviously, we had to focus on our game, but like I mentioned, it just makes those guys even more explosive. You know that [49ers Head Coach] Kyle [Shanahan] is going to do a good job of utilizing all of those guys within their scheme. It’s tough. It’s almost like opening day when you get the Raiders and you get all of those threats out there, as well. It’s hard to put your attention all on one person, you just have to do a good job of trying to move it around and try to help guys as much as possible, and make it difficult to find those matchups.”

On preparing for McCaffrey’s capabilities as a rusher, receiver and passer:

“I think the biggest thing that we’ve been talking about is trying to keep it simple on our end as much as possible. At least that allows the guys to play fast. With so much adjusting, in and out of different personnel, it’s hard to keep track of those guys, but if we can play our scheme the way that we want, we feel good about the matchups we have on Sunday night.”

On limiting explosive runs:

“It’s a continuation that we’re going to have each week. I don’t think that we’re going to solve it after one week even if we came back here and got it done. I think that it has to be a constant of us trying to continue to work on those elements of our game. We have another team that is explosive in the run game and they had a bye week to prepare. It’s been a huge emphasis for our team. We’re going to continue to do it. Like I mentioned before, the only way that I know how to get better is to continue going onto the practice field, continue trying to meet together, make sure that we’re seeing the puzzle in the run game the same way, and, hopefully, it will show up for us on Sunday.”

On the performance of CB Michael Davis and CB Asante Samuel Jr.:

“I thought that those guys played really tough. They made it difficult for their skillset; we knew that it was going to be a run game, but the opportunities that they had in the pass game, I thought that they really stepped up and played their game.”

On the value of competition in training camp for Davis and Samuel Jr.:

“That’s always a big thing because we know that, in this league, you never know. Competition, even behind those guys, is important, as well. You hate for injuries to happen, but they do happen. We even have to have those next guys ready in that aspect. I think that those guys are all approaching it because they know how life in the NFL is, so they have to be ready and be ready for their opportunities. I think that is what they are both doing; they’re capitalizing on their opportunities. We’re going to keep encouraging them because they are playing good ball, and we’re going to need them to step up big this week.”

On the impact of DL Austin Johnson being out for the remainder of the year:

“It’s tough. We talked all year long about having size and people struggling to move us. The interior has been really good. We know that there have been stretches where we lose the leverage on the outside, which is where a lot of the explosives happen, so to lose those bodies, it’s definitely tough. We have to try to piece together the guys that we do have, whether that’s [DL] Breiden [Fehoko] or [DL] Joe [Gaziano], getting those guys to step up and make sure that we can bring this thing together.”

On DL Otito Ogbonnia's development:

"He's steady coming on. He's improving each week. That's what you saw in that Atlanta game. We talked about getting knockback and staying connected on guys, and that is really what was expressed in that game. He was disappointed on the finishes, but that's good. He's showing signs of improvement and now he knows that he can create the knockback, and, now, the next step is to finish. I love the way that his game is going. We're going to keep encouraging him because he is going to need to step up big for us."

On LB Troy Reeder and DL Sebastian Joseph-Day providing insight into the 49ers' offense due to their familiarity:

"Troy [Reeder] was really huge. Just in the conversation I had with him, the biggest thing is that throughout the course of a game, these guys tend to just wear you down. Even if you're physical at the point of attack early on, they're going to stick to their run game. Any time that they get over 30 attempts, I think that their record is like 25-2, and he said that is what really happens in a lot of the ballgames that they have had. They play well early and wear [the opponent] out towards the end of the ballgame. He said that it's going to be encouraging for our leaders to continue to express that we need to finish the ballgame. Having that knowledge in the locker room and letting our guys know that, I think that is really important. You can't replace those guys that have been in those wars. That's important to have because now they can express exactly what they've been through the last few years."