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## Chargers Week 14 Media Availability

Thursday, December 9, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR JOE LOMBARDI

#### **On calling ‘Philly Special’ for the two-point conversion:**

“I just thought that it was a good two-point play. We had it in the tight red zone plan. In my mind, if a two-point play came up, that was one we were going to call, and it worked out.”

#### **On if running the play successfully gave the offense energy:**

“It looks clever, so everyone feels smart when it works. It gives [WR] Keenan [Allen] a chance to throw the football. It’s always fun to do something, whether it’s a receiver throwing it or a quarterback catching it or an eligible offensive lineman catching a touchdown -- those things always seem to amp up the energy level. It’s fun when it works out.”

#### **On ‘accessing the deep part of the field’ based on the coverages that the Bengals’ defense presented:**

“On the first one to [WR] Mike [Williams], we kind of hurried up to the line of scrimmage and ran a play. It was really just Mike singled up, they were in a single-high defense and he was one-on-one with the corner. He got some leverage on him. [QB] Justin [Herbert] threw a perfect pass and Mike [Williams] positioned himself perfectly to catch it over the shoulder. That was kind of a one-on-one matchup. On [WR] Jalen’s [Guyton], we were probably hoping for a different coverage, hoping for single-high again. Keenan [Allen] was running a double move out the right side. As we’re sprinting out, picturing the single safety running that direction, Jalen kind of got past the nickel -- they ended up in shell [coverage], but still distorted the coverage. He was one-on-one down there. [Head Coach] Brandon [Staley] always talks about how receivers catch those balls a lot more than DBs, so when you get a ball that far down the field, defensive backs are more likely to be in a panic mode than a receiver. Receivers just do that a lot more, so when you get a chance to throw the ball deep on one-on-one, more good things are going to happen than bad things, so whether it’s a pass interference, a catch, it usually works out well.”

#### **On if expecting the Bengals’ safeties to ‘stay on [WR] Keenan [Allen] underneath’ on the deep passes to WRs Mike Williams and Jalen Guyton:**

“Certainly, on the first play, that was something that was in our mind. As you run these over routes, different teams have different rules, but there are some teams that will drive the free safety down in the over and try to kick the cornerback to the deep third. As you put him on a corner route, then it becomes one-on-one and there’s no overlap safety because that guy’s coming from the opposite corner. That was something that was helpful there. The second one to Mike [Williams] was probably timed out a little bit different than maybe what we would have drawn up on the board. It would have given the safety more time to get over there, but Keenan [Allen] was on a little bit of a deeper route and he was getting a little caught up with that, so that helped out. The first one kind of was by design, the second one was more of Justin [Herbert] moving, the play extending and Mike being Mike.”

**On the offense's starting field position:**

"It was fantastic. You have to give credit to the defense and special teams. There's such a feeling of freedom when you're starting with the ball at the 40-yard line, near midfield. It's a lot easier to score points when you start there than if you start backed up. I think that was huge. Going into halftime, I thought that the biggest factor in the game was the starting field position. It was fantastic."

**On his ability to be creative with play-calling:**

"Knowing that whatever you see on film and an idea pops in your mind, like we can do it. There are no limitations with the receivers and the quarterback. Those plays take long, so the challenging part is the protection. We had one called on Sunday and they kind of wrapped the guy in and got a sack on us. That wouldn't happen if you're playing a little bit more rhythmic passing game, but there is a little bit of feast and famine with those plays. Have to try to battle out when the protection breaks down and hope that we can avoid those sacks in the future. That's the challenging part. When you have players like that, it's just how do we buy enough time to get those passes off?"

**On if Herbert 'is holding on to the ball too long':**

"A couple of those he was in a bad position based on the protection that we had and the defense that was called. Can we do a better job, maybe, of recognizing the defense and giving him a protection or a play to check to? I think that's a good answer. I don't think him holding the ball too long is a problem. Is there a play or two where maybe that happened? Perhaps, but I don't think it's like, 'Oh, you had a throw here, you had a throw,' here as much as like, 'Hey, let's just get rid of the ball in the fight another day.' I think that he's been fantastic, as far as the timing of getting the ball out. Some of these plays, when you're trying to access the deep part of the field, like we mentioned, it goes back to protection and us trying to have a protection plan that solves all of the different looks that you can get. Sometimes, you get caught and you go back to the drawing board a little bit and say, 'Next time, if we saw this, maybe we can check him into a different protection or a different play and avoid putting them in that bad situation.' But, if it happens, try to recognize it and throw the ball over the receiver's head and let's get back to second-and-10."

**On Herbert's sack on the bootleg:**

"The way that it came out, we could be here for 10 minutes talking about it. There really wasn't anywhere for him to go at that time, so it would be more of recognizing it and pulling up at a different spot and buying yourself a little bit more time. They are lessons that we'll keep learning and getting better at."

**On 'hurrying to the line to catch the defense with too many men on the field':**

"For whatever reason, a lot of the times when we're in that situation, it feels like the refs are standing over the ball, even times where we haven't substituted. The refs can't put the ball ready for play until they're all in position. I felt like when we've maybe been in a situation to do that, for whatever reason, that we haven't been able to snap the ball, they've given the defense time of substitute. He's in tune with it. I don't know how much that we really did a lot of that in New Orleans. I think of Green Bay, like [Packers QB Aaron] Rodgers is the king of recognizing that. That's kind of built into their system a little bit more than we have. It's something that we've talked about getting to, but first year, there are a lot of other things going on. I think he'd be really good at it, but just for whatever reason, we haven't had the opportunity as much as you would think."

**On starting the game with a third-down conversion:**

"Huge. I think that you're always looking to get that first first down on any drive and get into a little bit of a rhythm and make sure that you're not sticking the defense out there too fast. It's always a huge relief when you get that first down. It's always a big goal of ours to start to drive out the right way and avoid those three-and-outs. It's good for morale. It's good for the defense. It's good for rhythm, good for everyone."

**On if the Bengals 'are a single-high defense':**

"That's a simplified way to look at it. If we stated it out all of their coverages, you'd say that they were probably more single-high than shell, but every team mixes it up. You're going to get shell. You're going to get single-high. You're going to get man. You're going to get zone. Other than maybe the Seahawks in 2013, very few teams just come out and play the same coverage every single play. Teams mix it up and you study their tendencies, try to figure out what to expect. Then, looking at it, how do they disguise it? Can you tell pre-snap? Some teams disguise it better than others. If you can tell, do we want to get into a two-play menu for the quarterback to get from one to the other. There's a lot that goes into it. I would say that they were more single-high than shell over the course of the season. Nothing is 100 percent."

**On why Herbert's air yardage was increased this past game:**

"We might have called them a little bit more. But also, one thing we always try to emphasize is that when we call these plays, we're trying to push the ball downfield. Strike when it's there, and if it's not, we're usually trying to give them someone underneath that, like, 'Man, I don't think I got it, that's a dangerous throw.' Kick it to [RB] Austin [Ekeler] for a seven-yard gain or a tight end that's crossing for an eight-yard gain, hopefully. Sometimes the defense is in a coverage or it works out where he does not like the throw. We were part of it, the good field position, a little bit more aggressive. Then, it worked out where he liked the throws, and so the ball went up. A couple of factors that went into it, but every time you call a shot, you don't necessarily get a shot. Sometimes it gets checked down. A number of factors that worked in that way."

**On his level of satisfaction with the RPOs called on Sunday:**

"It's been huge. That [touchdowns] play specifically has been outstanding for us. There have been a number of big plays on that. Then, there are some other versions of RPOs that, have really worked out well for us. I think that it's been a productive part of the game for us. You look at the run stats and they say one thing, but to me, I called a run and it was a touchdown pass, or a 30-, 40-yard pass completion, but to me, that's part of the run game planning. I don't want to say it's stress-free yards, but you hand the ball off and the running back gets 12 yards, it feels easy and good because a lot more bad things can happen on a pass play than a run play, right? When your quarterback is operating like Justin [Herbert] is and he can make those good decisions and decide whether to hand it off or not, and all of a sudden you have a touchdown, it feels stress-free. The O-line is not pass protecting. He's pulling it because he sees something. You're not getting interceptions. You're not getting a lot of incompletions. You're getting a lot of positive plays. It's been fantastic."

**On G Matt Feiler:**

"He's been outstanding all year. That left side of the line has been such a strong point for our offense. Having those two together is huge. I think that those guys on the right side have been battling, too. When you have a day like that, at least the portions of the game where we were in rhythm, everyone was playing pretty well. He's a big part of our success that we've had this year, when we've been rolling on offense. Having him back is huge."

**On wide receiver depth:**

"I think it'll be a number of people. I'm sure that [WR] Josh Palmer will get more reps if Keenan [Allen] is not able to make it back in time. Jalen [Guyton] will be in there a little bit more. We'll keep incorporating the tight ends in there. We'll see after that. You can't replace Keenan if he's not here, but we do have enough firepower, I feel like, in our skill position room that we can weather the storm. That's the hope, anyway."

**On the development of WR Joshua Palmer:**

"I think a lot of it comes down to opportunities. When you have guys as productive as Keenan [Allen], Mike [Williams] and Austin [Ekeler] and the tight ends that we have, sometimes there's potential there that we're not able to access because you only have so many plays. As you're calling them, those guys sometimes get the priority because their veterans and they're skilled. I think that's the case on a lot of teams. There are some teams that are deep, that have players that have potential, that you're not able to utilize just because there's a limited number of reps and there's only one ball. I'm very optimistic about him. When he has gotten an opportunity, for the most part, it's been really good for the amount of experience, the amount of reps that he's had. I think his arrow is really, really pointing up."

**On Guyton's development:**

"I think when opportunities have come his way, for the most part, he's taken advantage of them. I think we have to keep understanding that he's a guy that can get deep. We have a guy that can throw it to him, so to keep giving them those opportunities is important."

**On if Herbert 'could have hit Guyton in the corner':**

"Yeah, I'm sure. I wouldn't put any limits on what he can do throwing on the ball."

**On the Giants' defense:**

"Man, they're strong inside, like strong up the middle. Their defensive linemen are heavy, violent and hard to move. Their safeties are really good. I've had some experience with [Giants CB James] Bradberry. I know that he's a real solid guy. [Giants CB] Logan Ryan, I don't know what his health statuses. I know that he was on the injury report, but he's very good. A little bit like the Patriots, there's just all these different numbers you see rolling in -- who's the nickel going to be, who's the dime going to be? Those teams do a really good job of cross-training all of their DBs and linebackers. As you're trying to talk to the receivers about how this is the number that you're probably going to be blocking on this, I don't know exactly who that's going to be. There's a lot of variety to the looks that they give the players that they have out there. They're a well-coached team. They're fundamentally sound. They do give you a large number of looks and little nuances of their defense that are problematic. I was hoping that they were going to be worse when I turned on the film, but they're a pretty solid group."

## **DEFENSIVE COORDINATOR RENALDO HILL**

### **On S Derwin James Jr. being nominated for the 2021 Art Rooney Sportsmanship Award:**

“He’s deserving. Obviously, we know what he does on the football field, but even as a person, the way he carries himself on and off the field, the guys in that locker room respect him. The people in the community respect him. You feel it off of him every day, just being around him and being in his presence. He’s a guy that is well deserving of that. I am happy that I am around that guy every day because he does lift you up, even when you have those days. He’s always in a good spirit. He carries that to the rest of the team, as well.

### **On OLB Uchenna Nwosu:**

“I think that he has been steady all year long. We talk about those guys just be able to stop the run and how those opportunities would create opportunities for us in the passing game. He’s been stout in the run game for us all year long, setting great edges. When you can stop guys on first and second down, it opens up those opportunities on the third down where we can rush the passer, and that was a good game to highlight that. We did a good job with stopping the run and it gave those guys a chance to express themselves. He took advantage of those opportunities.”

### **On creating takeaways:**

“We’ve mentioned it to those guys all year. They start coming in bunches. That was just a good example of that. It’s a tribute to how those guys prepare in practice each week. They attack it. When those opportunities start coming in a game, they take advantage of it. Go get the ones that are thrown to you. Obviously, Vato [CB Michael Davis] kept playing and got his [interception]. If he let up on that play, it was either on the ground or [Bengals WR Ja’Marr] Chase is tipping it back to himself. That’s just an example of a guy that keeps playing and finishing until the end. He’s been showing up on tape, just being around the ball. For T.C. [CB Tevaughn Campbell], being in a position to scoop the ball up, that’s something that we’ve talked about all year and it expressed itself in the ball game. We have to continue to do it because we know that good things will happen in that situation. Like I mentioned before, if you are stopping the run on early downs, it is going to allow those rushers to express themselves -- the sack-fumbles, all of those things will happen if we do those things on the early downs.”

### **On OLB Chris Rumph III ‘filling the void’ with OLB Kyler Fackrell injured:**

“It’s definitely going to be big for us. Go back a few weeks to when we were coming off of that bye and getting [LB] Kenneth Murray [Jr.] going, we knew that he had those attributes. That’s just another example of us developing depth and being competitive in different rooms. If a guy has [pass-rushing] attributes, let’s express it. This could be a situation where that expresses itself a little more, with K9 [LB Kenneth Murray Jr.] and also Rumph. He did a good job last week. He was stout against the run. He stopped the run, then it allowed him to express himself in those pass-rushing situations. We’re going to need more of that. Obviously, he plays a big part on special teams, but his role is going to increase on defense, as well.”

### **On CB Michael Davis developing within the new scheme:**

“I think that is a big part of it. A lot of times, when you’re in a new scheme, you are expected to do certain things. In our system, you play all of the things that [former Defensive Coordinator] Gus [Bradley] did, and a little bit more, as well. I think it’s really helping him expand his abilities at that position. We always talk about making guys complete DBs or linebackers or whatever position it may be. I think that he has really taken it head-on. He’s not shying away from it. I think he probably spends more time than anyone after practice just working on those things. He wants to be a complete DB. Any time you get an opportunity to make some plays, I think it just amps that up a little more. He battles every week. We know the assignments that we give him are not an easy deal. He’s approached it like a pro. He’s challenging guys each week. He’s stepping up to the plate every chance he gets.”



**On S Nasir Adderley's growth:**

"We still look at Nas as a young guy, no different than Vato [CB Michael Davis] because in his first year, he was pretty much out the whole year. He is playing in a different system than last year and now he's in a new system. He's still young and developing, but he has approached it like a pro. Nas is probably the best player that I have seen in the meeting room, as far as asking questions and making sure that he gets it. He takes great notes. I wish that I could show you his iPad. He's a guy who wants to know all those little details because he knows that it's going to help his game. I made a few challenges this week because he does play with his hair on fire out there. I think he can play more calmly in situations because he is so explosive. I think he wants to just do everything like a Tasmanian Devil. You can do all those things and still be able to play under more control. I think he is nowhere near his ceiling. We still have a lot to tap into. The way he has approached it every week and every day, I am happy with the progress that he has made."

**On what LB Kyzir White nearing 100 tackles on the season 'says about the defense':**

"It means that we have guys who want to get to the ball. When you see two guys getting 100, that means that you have a lot of population getting to the ball, that they are not out of touch of any play. It just makes those other guys want to hunt more. When I can see 44 [LB Kyzir White] flashing across the screen and when I see 33 [S Derwin James Jr.] across the screen, it lets me know that these guys are hunting and running. If I'm on that defense, I want to be doing the same thing. I think it provides that energy to the group, knowing that there is no play out of reach. If something does squirt out, we are going to minimize it with our speed of getting to the ball."

## **RUNNING BACK AUSTIN EKELER**

### **On how he is feeling physically at this point in the season:**

“Making progress. Definitely still feeling the game a little bit. Some games are better than others. This one, I definitely got beat up. As a running back. I’m kind of used to it over the years. I think it just adds to the journey. It’s not that I like it, but in the end, it was a real grind. I’ve had sprained ankles, bone bruises, bicep contusions, all this stuff. Just keep pushing through. It’s been a process to get back to feel healthy. Try to feel as healthy as I can. Then, put some tape on it and get back on the field.”

### **On two fumbles last week against the Bengals:**

“You’re going to get all types of scenarios. I ran an angle [route] across the field, obviously, I had the ball on the side of the defender. He put his helmet perfectly on it. It’s one of those where, yeah, it’s really hard to hang on to it, but that’s my job, so I to have to. The other one was actually poor technique on my part, the first one. I actually caught it like a check down and I started to move inside, like inside towards the middle of the field, because of that, subconsciously, whatever way I’m moving, I’m used to put the ball in that hand because the defender was out here, but everyone else is on the inside, obviously. I need to have the ball on this side, away from the middle of the field. All the bad guys are in the middle, keep the ball on the outside. It’s something that I have to learn from. We talked about it, do drills and preach about it every single day because it’s one of our fundamentals as a running back; ball security. It’s just a technique thing that I can easily fix. Not even worried about it.”

### **On ‘moving on’ from turnovers:**

“Sometimes, it drags on me. I’m very thankful for my teammates because they’re always picking me up, especially after that game -- I had two, so I was really down. I have to be better. I’m letting all of my teammates down and my whole organization. My teammates were picking me up. That encouragement was just really good to hear from those guys. It was from all different guys, defense and offense. I think I play better when I’m a little bit on edge, so I kind of ride things that always happen, or find something that is going to take me to this the switch. Now, I’m ready to play. Take that aggression and turn it up a little bit for me. I’m really hard on myself. I think that’s why because I think that I play better when I’m hard on myself, especially when I fumble, sometimes maybe a little bit too hard.”

### **On nearing the top of the league in total touchdowns:**

“It’s always nice to find the end zone. I’m not going to lie about that. I know that it makes my fantasy owners happy, as well. It really comes down to, as a team, how are we getting in the end zone? For me, I think that’s why I’m so valuable to the team; I can catch the ball, too. I can make plays out in space, catching the ball or running the ball. This year, I’m getting a lot more red zone touches than I was in the past. Kudos to the guys up front for making most of my touchdown runs pretty easy, as far as anything I had to do. I think that’s been a big part of it, as well, as far as my touchdown production, having those guys up front really be productive down in the run game in the red zone, which is crucial. When we get tight down in there, defenses get a little bit more compact, a little bit harder to throw the ball, so being able to run it really gives an upper hand for our offense and for our team.”

### **On working towards totaling 10 touchdown receptions this season, which would set the NFL record for most by a running back in a single season:**

“I think it would just add to the journey. When I’m in it, like how I’m in right now, I don’t really think about. That’s all great, I’d love to have that, but right now, while I’m in it, I’m just focused on the process, focused on the week-to-week. I hear that stuff. I see that stuff. I can’t hide from it. It would absolutely be great to have it, part of the journey. But, it’s one of those things that you look back on after the season, after your career.”

**On defeating the Bengals:**

“We’re supposed to win against every team. That doesn’t mean going in and saying that we’re absolutely going to beat these guys like it’s easy, because winning the NFL is the opposite of that. Like I mentioned last week, find some that you need to get better at and use that, I think, to motivate you throughout the week. Not necessarily that we won and we’re in a good spot so we can relax, that’s the last thing we can ever do. We haven’t won two games since the beginning of the season. Coach Staley said that the other day. That’s our reality. We have to find a way to put back-to-back games in, especially now. We have some COVID[-19] stuff going around with the offense. We have guys that have to step up, as well. This is the NFL that we live in right now. It’s fluid, but it comes back to how can I get myself in a routine to prepare myself so I can play well on Sunday? I know I have a lot to build from the Cincinnati game. I’m looking forward to it. We’ve already been doing it. I look forward to today’s practice just continuing to get better, get healthy and get back on the field and show that we can do it again.”

**On G Matt Feiler:**

“He’s the anchor for a reason. That is his nickname. It’s because he’s stout. He just does his job. When you talk about O-line, there’s never anything flashy because it’s blocking a guy and not scoring touchdowns, not getting stats. The fact that this man is really big and can move really fast, and actually get to his spots and use good technique, it just opens up a whole bunch of possibilities in the passing game and the run game. He’s been there since the beginning of the season, so he has a lot more reps than some of our backups. We have a lot of trust in him. When he goes down, now we have to build trust in the new guy, so we’re trying to get Matt back as fast as we can. It’s good to have this guy back just because I feel like we’re so secure up there. It’s great to have him back.”