

Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Sunday, August 6, 2023 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

Opening statement:

"Before I get going, I just wanted to make sure that we pay tribute to [Pro Football Hall of Famer and former Chargers Head] Coach [Don] Coryell. What a special weekend for him and his family and the Chargers. To see the last couple of days, the imprint that he left on the National Football League, I think it's been great to tell that story to our team, for them to understand the history of this club and how much Coach Coryell really meant for not only the Chargers, but for the National Football League. When you think about coaches like John Madden, when you think of coaches like Joe Gibbs, and not to mention all the Hall of Fame players that he affected — truly a legacy that still lives today in the passing game. When I was looking at some of the speeches for the Hall of Fame, to think that they led the NFL in passing six straight years, and seven years overall, and led the NFL in scoring. This guy was just a true innovator. Just want to pay our deepest respect and admiration. So proud to be part of this football team. With that, I'll take some questions."

On DL Sebastian Joseph-Day:

"Nothing to add there. He just has a quad contusion."

On K Dustin Hopkins:

"He's just working his way back into practice. He's been doing a lot of work on the side. No further updates than that."

On if Hopkins 'is dealing with something physically':

"He is, yes."

On if there is 'a level of concern' with depth along the defensive line:

"No, I think we've really been able to develop the depth in that room. You've seen, I think, that on display here, today and then throughout camp. We have a lot of young guys that are competing for spots. Those guys are working their way back. Sebastian [Joseph-Day] is off to a really good start to camp. We like where that group is right now. It's got a lot of room to improve. I think the preseason games are going to tell us a lot about where that group is at, in terms of stacking it for the regular season."

On CB J.C. Jackson:

"Just part of the process of going through a tough injury, and there's going to be a tough way back. We're just phasing him back in, with the recommendation from the medical staff. He's going to have some good days, he's going to have some tough days, and that's part of coming back from an injury like that. He has to build his strength up, and that's going to happen over the course of all of training camp."

On today's scrimmage:

"It felt a lot like camp out there, it looked like a lot like camp out there, just the healthy competition. Again, we got all of the situations covered. There's a lot of good players on the field, that's what I see. I see the execution in both phases. This is a group that, now, we get to go get ready to play a game against somebody else. We have to transition our training camp now, our phase, to get kind of ready for a game week. I like the way this group is working. They've been very professional. I like the team chemistry and the spirit that we're taking the practice field with. I think we're improving every time out there. That's what's important to us,"

On the depth at tackle 'changing the evaluation of a scrimmage when you're down players':

"You're seeing it on both sides of the ball. We have three key defensive linemen out, three key offensive linemen out. That's where your depth has to emerge and you get a chance to evaluate other people. That's what scrimmages like this are for. This is a good evaluation for us. Now, we have to get move into the next thing."

On 'if there is a cause for concern' regarding player illness:

"No. Just normal sickness going through a football team."

On OLB Tuli Tuipulotu:

"As advertised. He's a professional. Physically, he's ready to play in the National Football League. He's tough. He's a tone-setter out there in the run game. He has the quickness and the strong hands. He's instinctive. He's a sponge out there, so he learns the game really fast. He's going to have a role for us. The preseason is going to be a great opportunity for him to measure himself because he is going to make a lot of mistakes, he's going to learn a lot, but he's the right guy to be coaching. You've heard us say that, he's the right guy to be coaching. We felt him out here against our best guys, but there's a lot of work to do with him."

On OLB Chris Rumph II:

"He has improved every year. Last year, he emerged as a really key contributor with special teams, being a four core player. Then, kind of our fourth rusher. I thought he did a lot of good things at times. He kind of got sidetracked by that sprained knee midway [through the season], but he's made a lot of improvements. He's been very aggressive out there throughout 10 practices and has made a lot of plays, and continued his role on special teams. We feel really solid about his improvement. He has great makeup. Physically, that's where he had the most room to improve, when he was from a rookie to now, and he's made a lot of progress in that area."

On the running backs behind of RB Austin Ekeler:

"I thought they did some good things out there today, too — [RB] Josh [Kelley] and [RB] Isaiah [Spiller] both ran the ball well. From a pass protection standpoint, I think both of those guys are trustworthy. When it's live tackle to the ground, we're going to know more about what that competition is, but I think Isaiah has made very big improvements. I think it's been noticeable physically, running style, and I think he's made a lot more plays. He's always been a very reliable pass protector and pass catcher. Again, preseason will be big for both of those guys in discernment and determining where that sack is."

On Herbert's 'growth as a professional':

"I think it has been as big a part of his improvement as anything. His experiences now, he's seen a lot against us in practice. We try to disguise and play as much stuff as anybody in the NFL, but he has a way of undressing that now. He understands how to do it and how important that is. When you can do that, how you can really control the game. Because there's not a throw or play that he can't make on that field, but it's a lot easier to make those plays when you can completely understand and know and command and control what's happening on the other side. For our veteran players on defense, that's what's been tough on us, is that he's been able to really force our hand in a lot of ways. That just shows you where he's at, from a progression standpoint, and then he's still playing with the timing and the accuracy and the playmaking — you saw him in two-minute make a big play off of a loose play. You still have all that playmaking, but now, before the snap, just with him and [C] Corey [Linsley] working in tandem, we feel really good about those two working together."

On TE Tre' McKitty:

"He's improving. We're going to learn a lot more about him when it goes live here and preseason, but it's a big camp for Tre' [McKitty]. He has to prove himself. I think he's improving, but there's still a lot of work to do."

On DB Mark Webb:

"Mark has been a consistent playmaker for us. As you guys know, he has flashed in his two years, but some injuries have kind of sidetracked his progress. He's been really focused, from the springtime to now, and so what we've seen is more consistency in his assignments. He has always had ability. We think he's the right guy to be coaching. Then, from a special team standpoint, he has made a big jump with [Special Teams Coordinator] Ryan [Ficken] and [Assistant Special Teams Coach] Chris [Gould]. We think he's going to be a factor. In these games, the safeties, you always learn the most when they have to tackle to the ground. The passing game has never been one of Mark's issues. You find out about young safeties when they have to tackle. We'll find out next week. He's athletic, he's versatile. As you guys know, playing at Georgia — those guys are good friends of mine — he's well trained. This is his third year in the system, so we would expect a big jump from him this year."

On how the staff will approach the preseason and if it will be 'similar to last year':

"I think similarly. We haven't mapped it all out yet because we're going to kind of go through next week, but I think it will be a similar approach through training camp that we've had for the preseason games."

On if the team is 'where' he 'thought the team would be' at this point in camp:

"We are where we expect to be, which is that we want that practice field to be alive, we want there to be the consistency of the playmaking and the competition, overall execution. I think we're developing the depth in special teams, which is so important to your club. We've been able to get a lot of good evaluation out there. With some of these linemen being out on both sides, we've been able to really evaluate them against good people. The preseason is about finding out who that best 53 is, but I like the way this team is coming together. This team cares about each other, you can see it. We're competing the right ways. There are a lot of special players out there. I just think both sides of the ball are making each other better, and that's what I expect."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On giving two pairs of cleats away during camp:

"I did. They were getting pretty sweaty, so I didn't need them anymore [*laughter*]. Usually I go through them quicker than that. It kind of helps me out to be able to give them away."

On how many practices he wears a pair of cleats for:

"Usually they get worn down after a week or two. Then, generally, they get so worn down that you have to switch them out. I'm glad, as gross as they are, someone is willing to take them [*laughter*]."

On if he wears a different pair of cleats for every game:

"Generally, for the games, they get so beat up that you have to kind of switch them out. That's just something that, you're thankful for Nike, especially providing as many cleats as they do. That's really helpful."

On practice this evening:

"There were ups and downs. There were a lot of things that we can correct. There are some good things that we did, offensively. At the same time, we're going to watch the film either tonight or tomorrow morning. We're going to have to be honest with ourselves and attack the things that we could do better. I thought we moved the ball pretty well late and at the end. We had some drives going. It's part of camp. It's tough going against that defense. They're a really good defense. We see them all the time, they see us all the time. We're doing everything we can to move the ball, we'll be better at it."

On working with moving pieces on the offense:

"I think that's one of the great things about camp, is that you get to try out these new guys. To have guys fill in for positions that, normally, they're not playing, I think that's big. That's the development and learning process that you have to go through. I thought the offensive line did a great job battling today. It's a scrimmage. There are going to be tough parts. We're going to be put in difficult situations, but they handled it well and I thought they performed pretty well."

On growing with pre-snap reads:

"I think any experience is good experience, whether it's good or bad. I think, going through these past couple of years and picking up as much as I can, picking up as much as I can from the defense. Learning from [S] Derwin [James Jr.], [CB] J.C. [Jackson], [CB] Mike Davis and [CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.]. These guys are really good at hiding their disguises and playing defense. [S] Alohi Gilman has done a great job, too. Any time you get to spend with them before practice or after practice, finding out why they play certain leverages the way they do, they've been really helpful with that. At the end of the day, we're all competing together. We understand that we're just trying to get better. They've been really helpful."

On how he approaches talking to defensive teammates:

"I think it's kind of like you said, after plays. There will be a given play where maybe they played some technique that I wasn't expecting and I'll ask them. They're pretty helpful with that. They'll understand [and say], 'This is why I'm doing that.' They've been really helpful with that. Whether that's after a play, after practice, whether we're in the locker room or wherever, they've been really helpful with that."

On the two-minute drill:

"We gave ourselves a shot. We moved the ball when we needed to and put the field goal team out there. That's all you can do as a quarterback and as an offense. There are definitely things that we can clean up, offensively, but I thought, overall, two-minute, I thought that went really well."

On facing LB Eric Kendricks:

"He's very smart. Those linebackers are really well-coached and they're smart football players. When we I.D., a guy, they're able to flip it and kind of go through this process of getting the right guy to blitz. Eric, he's seen so much football. He's been around. He's had so much success in this league. He has a great feel for our offense. He's one of those guys that's able to pick it up pretty quickly."

On WRs John Hightower and Terrell Bynum:

"I think [our relationship] has been really good. Kind of like I said, in camp you're getting these reps with the guys that aren't generally ones and twos. To have guys be able to step up and get timing with them, I think that's huge because they're going to have to play in the one and two spot, eventually. That's part of football — adversity and injuries. Those guys have stepped up big-time. When their name is called, they'll be ready."

On if his rapport with younger players helped last season when they played:

"Yeah, I think that's a big reason that [WR] Josh Palmer has stepped up big-time. We called his name and he answered. He had to step up big-time. You're down [WRs] Mike [Williams] and Keenan [Allen], someone has to deliver. I thought Josh Palmer did a great job of filling that void."

On RBs Joshua Kelley and Isaiah Spiller:

"They've been running the ball really well. They're running hard downfield. They're smart players. They were able to pick up the offense pretty quickly. Both of those guys are competing. At the end of the day, they're great locker room guys. They take care of each other. We're comfortable with whoever is out there."

On the state of the offense:

"It's kind of hard to answer. I think that we've made a lot of improvements. I think we're right where we need to be in camp. It's early. There is still a lot of room for improvement, but there's a lot of time left. I think this scrimmage was good to get our guys out here and compete, and go up against a really good defense. It's up to us to kind of correct those minor details, figure that out and keep moving forward."

On the approach of the offense moving forward in camp:

"I think, as long as you're keeping your focus [on the] main thing and you're detailed on all of those details, I think that's the important thing. If you let it be a distraction, it can be a distraction, but those guys are dialed in. I know we'll have another good week of practice and preparation for this preseason game."

On sustaining energy through camp:

"I think competition has been huge. I think those guys have really grasped that idea well. Whether it's one-on-ones, seven-on-seven, team periods, these guys have been getting after it. I think that's great because we're pushing each other. As long as the offense is pushing the defense and vice-versa, we're going to get better. It might not always go our way, but to have those guys push us, I think that's been big this year."

On Oregon moving to the Big Ten:

"Growing up a Duck fan, it's always tough to kind of see the change like that. I grew up a Pac-10 fan, then to the Pac-12. It's always weird, change. I'm excited for Oregon. They obviously have a tough schedule coming up. I'm all for that school. They've given me so much support and care over the years. All I can do is reciprocate it. Whatever they end up doing, I'm all on board for."

On potentially being the final Oregon QB to lead the team to the Rose Bowl in the Pac-12:

"If that's the case, I guess that's pretty cool. I'm excited to watch them in the Big Ten. That's a great opportunity for them to play against some really good football teams. It's tough moving on from the Pac-12, but I'm looking forward to watching them."

SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.

On the scrimmage today:

"Started fast, I felt a lot of energy. It felt that way it's supposed to feel."

On the pass rush:

"It felt good. Seeing those guys get off the ball, even in the run game, I didn't have much to clean up. They were getting off the ball pretty well. It was a solid day for us."

On the 'young guys in the secondary':

"They're learning. We're playing against [QB] Justin [Herbert] and those guys so we tell them 'If they make a play on you we're going against a good offense so get back in the huddle.' They're still learning, it the little mistakes but there's a lot of dogs out there for sure."

On the safety group:

"I feel like we have a very tight knit group, one of the tightest groups on the team. Whether it's Alohi [Gilman], JT [Woods], Mark Webb or Raheem Layne, it doesn't matter who it is, those guys are ready to play when they're number is called. They're learning, asking me questions and they're getting better every day and we're gaining more confidence in them, every day they're starting to make plays and taking the coaching."

On Justin Herbert leading the offense:

"Him being able to read me and being able to read the defense, being able read the safeties and seeing when the blitz it's coming, he's getting the offense into the right checks. I feel like Justin is getting better and he's pushing us, and making throws, too."

On Offensive Coordinator Kellen Moore's offense:

"Those guys are big, they're getting the ball down the field. We're doing everything we can, so we have to get out there and cover. They're giving us great looks, we're just trying to come out here on defense and get them ready to go against somebody else during the season."

On S Alohi Gilman:

"He's a ball hawk. You can make plays when you know what to do. It's hard for you to make plays if you don't know what you're doing. Alohi has been a guy that's been here and when his number is called, he's making plays and there's a lot of confidence in him. Everyone in the organization believes in him. He's just making plays, that's who he is a playmaker."

On CB Asante Samuel:

"I told him the more you can do the more value you bring to this team and to yourself. With him being able to guard guys on the red line and then get in the slot and guard guys, it's just going to help our team. Especially having [CB] J.C. [Jackson] and Mike [Davis], having guys that can do multiple things — I can go in the slot too. Having different people that can play any role will help us a lot."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.:

"To me this has been his best camp since he's been here, and I'm not just saying that. He's flying around, more confident. He believes in the defense. Him and Eric Kendricks are in there having fun. When you see one you see the other, he's been loving it a lot and it's been great."

On LB Eric Kendricks' influence on Murray:

"I don't want to give all the credit to Kendricks cause [Kenneth] Murray has put in a lot of work. He's worked his tail off learning the schemes, getting out there and doing the workout and working hard. I feel like adding EK was definitely a big help, but you've got to give Murray some credit too he's getting better."

On the 'competitiveness and energy' throughout camp:

"It definitely feels different, the energy feels different. When you come out here and you're not ready to play you're going to get exposed by the offense. The same thing for them, if they're not ready they're not going to make a play on defense. It's like that every day. You have to come to practice and play every day. It's not just getting through practice, you have to come out here and compete. It's helping us."

On why the energy feels different:

"Having more guys that can make plays. Having more depth and more guys around, whether it's more receiver or more DBs. Everybody knows that the guy behind me is just as good as me. Competition breeds the competitiveness that we need."