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LOS ANGELES CHARGERS vs. CLEVELAND BROWNS POSTGAME TRANSCRIPTS

Sunday, October 10, 2021 ⚡ SoFi Stadium ⚡ Inglewood, Calif.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On QB Justin Herbert:

“To win a game like this, one that turns into a track meet, you have to have a superstar quarterback to win it. That’s what he is, he was fantastic in the game. That’s an awesome defense that he’s playing against, that defense is really good. Seeing them in person, they’re very complete — they have front rushers, they have second-level players that can run. They’re doing a really nice job coaching the secondary — J.J. [Browns S John Johnson III] and T-Hill [Browns CB Troy Hill] have really helped stabilize that group. They have a lot of players. For us to play like we did today, it starts with Justin. Like I told the team in there, the reason why he’s being able to play how he’s capable of playing is because he has a really good team around him. The offensive line was outstanding today. Our receivers, tight ends and backs were fantastic. What that does is it allows him to go and be who we all know he is. You can’t win a game like that if you don’t have a player like Justin Herbert.”

On the back-and-forth fourth quarter:

“It doesn’t make it any less stressful. I was proud of our team. In the National Football League, you’re going to play all sorts of different games. Some of them are going to be low scoring, where maybe it’s 10-3, 10-6, something like that; it’s a slugfest. Other games are like today, where they turn into a track meet. What you have to be able to do as a team is play the game as it expresses itself. What we needed was our offense to score today. What we needed from our defense was to get stops when we needed to. That’s what we did today. We did enough on defense to be able to win. Offensively, that second half was fantastic. I’m really proud of our entire team for winning that game because it took every man in that room to win it.”

On the Chargers fans:

“I felt all the Power Blues. This was a big game with the Latino Heritage. What we’re trying to do here is earn respect every time we go out. Today was a great chance against a really good team. [Browns Head Coach] Kevin [Stefanski] is doing great job with that team, they have a lot of really good players and they’re going to be there at the end. What you need to be able to do is beat good teams in this league. To be able to do that in front of our home crowd, hopefully that draws even more in the next game. We’re proud of our fans and we look forward to seeing a lot more Power Blue as the season goes on.”

On clock management after the two-minute warning on the final offensive possession:

“We knew we needed to get down and have really good run defenses. We felt like, ‘Hey, these are the run defenses that can get us a stop here.’ That’s what we did on first and second down. On third down, we had a really good rush plan, and were able to deny the ball. What ended up happening in that game was they have really good backs, a really good interior O-line, and really good tight ends. What happens is when you get a little bit off in the first level, and you get a little bit off in the second level; you don’t start tackling, one guy does this, one guy does that. What happens is you’re all out of rhythm. What we try to do at the end of the game is get our guys into rhythm with good run-structures that they’re confident in. That’s part of the adjustments you have to make in the game when you’re not playing well. What can we go execute to get us a stop? I’m really proud of our defensive coaching staff, and I’m really proud of our defensive players for rallying up together. That’s what you have to do. You have to have that type of resilience to be able to get your act together. That’s what we were able to do at the end of the game.”

On RB Austin Ekeler:

“Austin’s one of those guys that’s the ultimate competitor. What you can do is activate him in the passing game and in the running game to give you an advantage depending on how people are playing you. I feel like he showcased both of those things. The other thing about him is that fumble at the end of the half. He’s one of those guys that’s going to bounce back and make something happen for your team. I was proud of him. When you have a fumble like that, sometimes it can kill your spirit, but not his. I feel like we needed all of his production today. He ran the football really well, too. We were close on a couple runs, but he had two touchdowns. And then in the passing game, another touchdown catch. Three touchdowns, and we needed all that in the passing game. Against a rush that’s that good, you have to find your backs for some breathers back there when the pocket’s chaos. I’m really proud of him.”

On the Browns ‘scoring’ Ekeler’s last rush touchdown:

“I have to get ruling there. It was my interpretation that you can’t be pulled in. You can see that Austin’s clearly trying to go down, it was ‘32 Duo, Alert No Más,’ which is ‘get down.’ I feel like I need to get an interpretation on that. I certainly did not want to go in on that one.”

On if QB Justin Herbert could have taken a knee in that situation:

“You can. That’s one way to go, but we felt we could go 32 Duo, and then force a timeout and go from there. We were planning to finish the ball without any time left. That’s just not the way it happened.”

On K Tristan Vizcaino’s missed extra points:

“We were going to need him to possibly finish the game. With Tristan, we’re going to have to deal with this. He’s a young kicker in the league. He has a fantastic kickoff leg, and as a kicker, he needs to be in a lot of those situations to make sure he gets his rhythm and timing. He missed two today, that was disappointing. But what we need him to do is bounce back. He’s a talented guy. He’s just like a lot of young players in the league; you have to stay patient because he’s good enough. If he weren’t good enough, that would be a totally story. But he’s good enough and we have to stay patient.”

On his belief in Vizcaino:

“That’s certainly something to address down the road. We do have a good team, but I think he’s going to be part of that good team. We have to stick with him for now, and I have a lot of confidence in him. That’s why I’m talking about it, I’m not just saying it, I really believe in the guy.”

On WR Mike Williams:

“The guy’s a fantastic receiver. He’s a complete receiver. He can beat you in the deep part of the field, he can beat you in the first or second level. He can move throughout the formation and what you’re seeing is a guy who, when you need a win, can. He can. The guy’s a clutch player and I’m super proud of him. He’s worked really hard, he’s stayed patient. Sometimes it goes on for guys at different times in the league, and sometimes you have to join up with the right people. Timing and all these factors come into play, and they’re all in play. We have a really good offensive line; it’s blocking well for him. We have a bunch of weapons around him. And then we have a quarterback that’s really unique. I’m just super proud of him, and we’re going to need all that production. We needed all 165 yards today, and two touchdowns, for us to win.”

On blocking against the Browns' pass rush:

"All those guys battled. I want to tip my cap to [T] Storm Norton, he had a baby yesterday. This is a really unique time for he and his wife. He got to the hotel late last night and blocked one of the best rushers in all of football — one of the best defensive players in all of football. I thought it was a team operation today. It's not going to be a bunch of clean pockets; sometimes when they know it's pass, it's going to be crowded. I thought [QB] Justin [Herbert] did a nice job being strong with the football. He made some plays with his legs — they were playing split safety-man, and he was able to use his legs on some of those third downs to get some first downs with his feet and buy us some time. There were some PIs thanks to him escaping, and then throwing it in the deep part of the field. I felt like our O-line today battled. In the run-game, what we did was have 23-for-112, if you take Herbert's out of there. We didn't give them enough possessions on defense. The data would've been different, from a running game-standpoint, if we'd created more possessions for them. In the first half, we just weren't playing well enough. But I felt like we were really connected today, and I have a lot of respect for that defense. They're really well."

On the offense's ability to consistently convert on fourth down:

"It's just where the game was going, time, score. And then four and two isn't a big deal for us. I felt like [Offensive Coordinator] Joe Lombardi was fantastic today. I can't say enough about him and our entire offensive staff. Our guys are executing well in those 'got-to-have-it' situations. We needed it today. We needed all those plays, and I'm really proud of our offensive football team today. Games like this happen in the NFL, and they held the rope for us today. On defense, we were able to give them enough for them to finish it."

On the offensive drive capped by Herbert's nine-yard rushing touchdown:

"That was big. Defensively, that was a wind out of our sails-type possession. It was frustrating, we were just off. For our offense to respond like that was huge in the game because if you don't, time's not on your side. I felt like the fourth-down conversion would give us some rhythm and we were able to finish that drive with points. That completely flipped the momentum of the game. Now, our defense is feeling better and we're able to settle our guys. Our guys were able to get to the bench. What that drive does, too, is it defensively gives us more time to figure things out. I felt like our coaches and players on defense did a nice job of coming together. Keeping our heads on straight, keeping our composure, and in the second half, defensively, we were playing well. We just had that silly eight-yard touchdown to [Browns RB Kareem] Hunt, which I take full ownership for. But we played really well, and that drive really did a lot for us."

On the decision to go for two in the fourth quarter:

"It felt like the time and score of the game, we needed it. That thing could've gotten away from us."

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.:

"We just needed to calm him down out there. Asante had a couple of moments there in the first quarter where we just needed to keep his head on straight. It happens sometimes. He still played well. It's just something young players go through. He's been fantastic for us, and he's going to continue to be. We just wanted to settle him down, that's all."

On the run defense:

"I'm not pleased with how it went today. I don't think we played or coached well enough today. What we have to do is tell the truth about what's happening. This is the second time in a game that we've given up far too many yards. What happens is it has a really adverse effect on the team because it limits possessions for your offense. We have to play better, and we have to coach it better. It's a team operation, and we will because we have the right type of guys in there. That's a really good running football team, so I'm not taking anything away from them. As a matter of fact, I'm tipping my cap to them, those guys can really coach over there. They have a bunch of really good players, but we need to play better, for sure, if we're going to beat the teams we need to beat moving forward."

On G Oday Aboushi's injury:

"It's a knee. We're going to find out more here after the game."

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On the how the fourth quarter transpired:

"It was unreal. I looked back at the stats, and I think it was 26 [points] in the fourth quarter, 34 points total in the second half. I think that's huge for our offense."

On his fourth-down throw to WR Keenan Allen in the fourth quarter:

"We had some pressure. The protection broke down, I scrambled out and I knew that Keenan is one of those guys that you can throw the ball to and he's going to make a play, with how many times we've repped that in practice with those scramble drills of him finding the right space to get to. As soon as I threw it, I knew that he was going to make something special out of it."

On if he felt 'in the zone':

"I thought we played pretty well offensively as a group. I thought we ran the ball really well late down the stretch. Some of those guys outside, the receivers, they made some great plays. [WR] Mike [Williams] stepped up huge, [WR] Keenan [Allen], [WR] Jalen Guyton, [TE] Jared Cook, all those guys. When we needed to step up, those guys came up huge today. So, I'm really, really, thankful for them."

On the receiving corps:

"It makes my job a lot easier, just to throw the ball to them. [WR] Mike [Williams] did a great job of breaking separation, especially on those two posts that he ran. He did a great job running those routes that we've run all the time in practice and get a bunch of reps on. It was great to see him be able to do that and execute well."

On where the team's 'belief in themselves' on fourth-down attempts comes from:

"Just the belief as an offense and how I think we've done a great job of that all year. We've always talked about going into the huddle and feeling confident in each other, knowing that all of the players in that huddle are special players, and any of those guys can make a play on fourth down. I know that we've got the right guys out there."

On if today's high-scoring game had a 'college feel':

"A little bit. It kind of like those college football shootouts with a lot of points. I thought it was a lot of fun to be a part of. I thought the defense came up with some big stops when we needed them to, and the offense came down and scored. That's one of those situations late in the game that we have to work on, getting down and continuing to work on that. But, overall, it was really pleasing."

On the call to go for it on fourth-and-two on their own 24-yard line in the third quarter:

"I don't know how many coaches would've made that. I know ours did, though. They believed in us, and I believe in them. That entire offense, I believe in those guys. Those guys up front, they blocked super well today. That's a tough defensive front that we went up against and I thought they handled them pretty well."

On RB Austin Ekeler praising his leadership skills:

"I really appreciate those kind words from him. He's obviously one of those vocal leaders of our team. He's done an incredible job all offseason, all season, of stepping up and being a vocal leader. Not only to that running back group but our offense and the team. That means a lot coming from him."

On the outcome of the game:

"That's one of those things that [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks] Shane Day always talks about; as long as there is time on the clock and downs to be played, we've got a chance. It didn't go the way that we thought it was going to today. We didn't imagine putting up 47 points like that, but sometimes that's how you have to win games in the NFL. Coach Day and I talk about that. It's just good to see from our guys."

On the Browns pulling RB Austin Ekeler into the end zone for the final score:

"That's one of those situations where we instructed him not to go into the end zone, and he did a great job of stepping up and giving himself up before the end zone. The Browns grabbed him and brought him into the end zone. That's a smart play by them. That's something that we have to talk about and continue to develop so that we can be better on that in the future."

On 'how much credit Offensive Coordinator Joe Lombardi deserves':

"All of it. He's a special play-caller and he's got such a great feel for the game and for the relationships on our team. All those guys on offense and defense, they respect him, and I do, too. He makes all of us want to work harder for him. He's a selfless guy that knows so much about the game. He's done an incredible job for us."

On T Rashawn Slater's performance today:

"I saw that back in spring camp. Since he showed up and knew how special he was going to be. He's done an incredible job so far. It is a bonus if you get the running back out to clip, but Rashawn is doing an incredible job. We feel really comfortable with him at left tackle."

On team's mentality at the end of games:

"We are learning how to win games. I think that has been huge for us. Over the past couple of years, we've let a couple get away, but the NFL is tough. Winning games in the NFL is not easy. You have to find a way because all of them are going to come down to two minutes late in the game; repping that in practice and experiencing that helps us."

On WR Mike Williams:

"We believe in him. He is one of the best to do those jump ball-type plays. Any chance I can get the ball one-on-one with him, we feel really comfortable getting that with him."

On the points the Browns defense allowed:

"That's not what we've seen from their defense. They have an incredible front side, and they have some really good cover guys; their linebackers can really stretch the field. Watching the film, that was very apparent with how much they have been able to disrupt the quarterback and all the sacks they've been able to get. We had to have a great week of preparation, we had to have a good protection plan, we had to be solid, and we had to be perfect. It played out like that, and I think we stepped up big time when we needed to."

On leading the AFC West Division:

"It's all about improvement. We've had a good stretch of games, but it is all about next week. We have a Baltimore [Ravens] team that we have to go play. They're pretty tough. They present a lot of challenges. It is all about watching this tomorrow morning. We will get better from it, but it is all about moving on and continuing to develop and get better."

On the crowd's energy:

"I thought the Charger fans did a great job showing up. We appreciate their support. It all went well for us."

On watching the Ravens tomorrow night and any benefits that presents:

"You watch it to see what they run. It is a little different since the angles are different from the film that we watch."

On the Chargers' receiving corps:

"I've been pretty fortunate to play with some great receivers. At my time at [University of] Oregon, we had some great receivers. The guys we have here I believe are the best in the world. Keenan, Mike, Jalen, and even those tight ends [Donald] Parham, Jared Cook and Steven Anderson, they've done an incredible job stepping up. They work so hard. All week, the things that people don't normally see, the stuff at practice and the meetings. They are selfless guys that are doing an incredible job."

On the 'incorporation of WR Mike Williams' into the offensive scheme:

"I think we've done a much better job of spreading it out and getting him the ball. Noticing that he's a matchup nightmare, and what he has been able to do, that's not luck. He's worked hard and done a lot of work in the offseason. All those times we've thrown in the offseason are paying off."

CLEVELAND BROWNS HEAD COACH KEVIN STEFANSKI

Opening statement:

“[Browns CB] Greedy [Williams] had a right shoulder injury. We will MRI that tomorrow. [Browns CB] Denzel Ward, neck. We will MRI that tomorrow. [Browns T] Jack Conklin, knee. We will MRI that tomorrow. [Browns S] M.J. Stewart has a right hamstring and we will MRI that, as well. Disappointed. I give credit to the Chargers. They played a good game and we didn’t come through there in a couple spots. I’m sure there’s about a thousand reasons why, but we have to make sure we make those corrections from this game and then move on. We have an undefeated team coming to our place next week.”

On why he didn’t call a timeout towards the end of the first half:

“That’s a good question. I’ll have to look at it again. Off the top of my head, I don’t have a good answer for you. Obviously, we need to come through. I need to come through for our team.”

On the second-to-last offensive series:

“We obviously wanted to score. Ran it on first down. Second down, we tried to get a double move on their corner. We really wanted the clock to run there, as well. That was incomplete. With where we were with our tackle position, quite honestly, just didn’t feel like I wanted to give a chance for something bad to happen there again. All of these things I would tell you, I need to do a better job. I share in that loss just like everybody else does. We’re going to win these games together and we’re going to lose these games together. I certainly need to do a better job.”

On if he was planning on getting the ball back after running on third-and-10:

“Third-and-10 back there, I don’t know what the percentages are, but obviously we’re trying to hold them. It’s hard to say when they scored so many points, but they were converting fourth downs. We just had to make a play there, and we didn’t. Listen, our defense gave up seven points last week and six points the week before. Like I said, we will win as a team and lose as a team. We will share in this.”

On how Chargers Head Coach Brandon Staley has ‘changed the Chargers’ trajectory’:

“I don’t know. I don’t know Coach Staley well. We didn’t play them last year, so I can’t give you a great answer. They’re doing a nice job, their entire coaching staff and their players. They’re obviously a good team.”

On if he reached a point where he ‘needed to try something different’:

“Yeah. We’re trying to score every time we touch it. We’re trying to stop them. We tried various coverages. As you know, I hate to even mention injuries because they are a part of the game. We were into our depth in a couple areas. I trust the guys that were in there, but we didn’t come through, so I’d tell you we have to look at all of it. We can’t just say it’s one thing or the other. I’m sure it’s a multitude of things.”

On if he would have rather ran more clock down before scoring in the fourth quarter:

“I think it’s hard. Points are a premium. There are opportunities, certainly late in games, when you want to use the clock. I don’t know if the seven minutes was on my mind. I wanted to make sure we scored there. I thought our defense did a great job coming back and forcing them into the end zone so that we could touch the ball one more time. I would just tell you guys that there are certainly things that I’m really disappointed that I did in this game. I got to come through for our team.”

On ‘two busted coverages’ that led to long Chargers touchdowns:

“I will tell you that we will talk about it. It is obviously a miscommunication and we had too many of those. They had big plays. They got behind us on some broken plays, they had some DPIs, so we have to do a better job. I have to look at it and obviously make sure we make those corrections.”

On the overall difficulty of the game:

“I think you have to coach the game that is in front of you. That’s how the game played out today. They are a good football team. I give credit to Coach Staley and that staff and those players. They beat us.”

On QB Justin Herbert:

“He’s a good player. He got the ball out of his hands and he made plays with his feet. His play was outstanding on the fourth down. We need to try to find a way to get off the field.”

On why they didn't try to go 'down the field earlier' on the final offensive possession:

"What I would tell you is the first goal there is to try to get to midfield, to try to put yourself in a position to throw a Hail Mary. I also just wanted to be smart with our protection to make sure that we weren't holding the ball. That's a good front and we were in our depth there at tackle."

On Browns QB Baker Mayfield's performance:

"I have to look at it. Obviously, I thought he was getting the ball out of his hands, making it really good in terms of completions. We wanted to make sure we could get a bunch of completions. To give you a better assessment, I'd have to look at it."

On if he 'got a good look' at the fourth-quarter, fourth-down defensive pass interference call on Browns CB A.J. Green:

"I didn't get a good look at it, no."

On what he thought of the fourth-quarter, fourth-down defensive pass interference call on Green:

"They called it."

On if the defenders were instructed to let RB Austin Ekeler score on the Chargers' final possession:

"They did a great job pushing."

On if he felt today's game was 'well-coached in terms of analytics':

"The defensive coach in me would say that I hope not. We have to find ways to get stops, and we have been doing that as a defense. We didn't do that today. Whatever the reasons are, we will talk about them. We just have to be ready for whatever game it is. For instance, last week I don't think we saw the game unfolding like that. As coaches, we need to react to the game that is being played."

On Browns RB Nick Chubb:

"Nick is powerful. He made some big runs for us today. He has breakaway speed, as you saw. Great teammate."

On if the Chargers 'adjusting' to using personnel sub-packages with three tight ends:

"They adjusted. They are a multiple personnel, multiple front defense. I think within that 13 [one running back, three tight ends] personnel that you're talking about, I think you saw a bunch of different fronts and coverages."

CLEVELAND BROWNS QUARTERBACK BAKER MAYFIELD

On Browns RB Nick Chubb's contribution to the offensive operation:

"It makes it a lot easier, I can say that. Our rushing attack, week in and week out, is one of the best in the league. We leaned on that today. We passed the ball when we needed to, and we just didn't make the plays we needed to win. We left too many points on the board in the first half. We missed red zone opportunities; we have to take advantage of them."

On 'the frustration of not being able to put the Chargers away':

"Obviously, that's why we lost. We didn't make enough plays to win the game, and that goes for everybody on our team. We didn't do that. Like I said, we left too many points on the board in the first half. It would have been the same outcome, needing a touchdown to tie the ballgame up late in the game if we had done that early on. So, we just have to do our job. We haven't played a complementary football game yet."

On if he could have called a timeout at the end of the first half:

"No, that's [Browns Head Coach] Kevin's [Stefanski] decision. He calls all the timeouts."

On TE David Njoku's performance:

"David played great. I think, obviously, he made the big play, he broke that tackle and make a huge play. And then we needed the two-point conversion to get up by seven, so we did. We made a good plays, but I don't know. That's the story of it."

On any ‘missed opportunities’ that stand out to him from today’s game:

“Late in the game. Might as well forward the fine letter now. We asked the ref on the sideline how the hell he missed that call. They were shoving [Browns WR] Donovan Peoples-Jones out of bounds, and then Higgy [Browns WR Rashard Higgins] gets grabbed, so there’s two PIs on the one play. They didn’t call it, but we shouldn’t even have been in that position. We left too many points on the field in the first half. It’s very frustrating that we didn’t do our job well enough to just take the ballgame away. We left it in the hands of somebody else. We have to be better on that.”

On if it’s ‘a stunner’ that 42 points scored did not lead to a win:

“That’s a really good team – a three-and-one team, now a four-and-one team. We knew that we were going to have to score points going into this. One of our points of emphasis this week was taking advantage of red zone opportunities; getting touchdowns, not field goals. I’m going to keep harping on it, we didn’t do that enough.”

On QB Justin Herbert:

“I think he takes care of the ball. I think he makes great decisions, obviously. He used his feet a lot today when the opportunities arose. He made a lot of plays today. He’s extremely talented and leads these guys. He got the win today.”

On whether the missed pass interference calls ‘are more frustrating because the Chargers got a crucial fourth-down call’:

“Absolutely. You would like to see it called both ways, if that’s the case. It’s just a critical point in the game to where if they’re going to call it on fourth down, then we should get it on second.”

On the decision to run on third-and-nine in the fourth quarter, giving the ball back to the Chargers on the ensuing possession:

“I mean, it’s, hindsight is 20-20. You look at last week right before halftime when we ran the ball on third-and-20 and we converted it. We we’re trying to do the same thing, to see if one of these can pop, while also running some time off the clock and seeing what happens. I think we gained seven or eight on that, so it wasn’t like it was that far off. It was just the flow of the game.”

On the offensive line’s performance after injuries sustained to starters:

“I thought they played great. [Browns G] Blake Hance, obviously, is a guy who’s stepped up in tough situations and in critical situations. He’s played well for us and I think that he played great today. [Browns T] James Hudson [III] coming in for [Browns T] Jack [Conklin], I thought he played well, as well. We just didn’t make the plays we needed to win the game, but I’m proud of the way those guys played.”

On the positives from today’s performance:

“I thought we were efficient in the pass game, we just didn’t make the plays we needed to. I’m not going to be happy about it, we didn’t win the damn game. That’s truly all that matters to me. I’m going to be hard on myself regardless. I didn’t do enough today to win the game.”

On if today’s game ‘had a playoff feel’:

“It did. In somebody else’s house, obviously, a loud environment. Yeah, that’s a team that is a playoff-caliber team, one that we’ll probably see down the road. We just have to take care of business and see what happens.”

On how he was ‘feeling physically’ last week:

“Pretty much the same as I was last week. Pretty much the same as I was last week.”