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Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Thursday, August 11, 2022 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On this past week of practice:

“I think our guys are ready to compete against somebody else. I think we’re at that healthy point in camp where our systems have been installed, you’re playing against the same people, and there’s that extra physicality that comes with playing against the same people all the time. I felt like it has been a really healthy competition, especially coming off the scrimmage, to have two really good days of practice. I feel like our guys are improving, that’s what I like to see the most, is that we’re improving. It got a little edgy this week on the practice field, and that’s always a healthy thing because I look at it as a sign of pride in performance. I thought it was healthy competition back and forth. I’ve been looking for that for it to be even competition. We’ve done a lot of really good special teams work this week, I think. Building off the scrimmage, we’ve been able to really get some good special teams work because that’s going to be a big, important part of Saturday night. I’m looking forward to seeing our guys compete in that phase.”

On the injury status of CB Tevaughn Campbell:

“T.C. will be out for this game. We’re looking to get him back next week, but he’ll be out for this game.”

On the injury status of LB Ty Shelby:

“We got good news on him. He’s going to be out for this game, but we’re looking to get him back. He’s kind of week-to-week, it shouldn’t be anything like for the rest of the training camp. Will miss this game, and we’re hoping to get him back for the Dallas practices, but we’ll let you know about that.”

On the injury status of LB Nick Niemann:

“Nick is going to be like more of a game-time decision. We really were trying to see how he did in individual today and we’re going to get an update here after practice, and then kind of go from there.”

On if there are any ‘updates’ involving S Derwin James Jr.’s contract:

“Not yet.”

On if he would ‘like to have James out there’ for joint practices with the Cowboys next week:

“Of course, we would like to have Derwin out there, but at the same time, as I mentioned, I think what’s most important to us is that we get the contract negotiation right. First things first is just keeping the main thing, the main thing. Then, all of the football stuff will take care of itself. Derwin has been very patient through the process and he’s been a tremendous leader, like he always is, through the process. I think he’s handled it extremely well. His teammates have handled it extremely well. We’re looking for good news soon.”

On how quarterback rotation will play out on Saturday:

“You’re going to see both quarterbacks in the preseason. It’s going to be a real healthy competition between both of them. I like the way both of them are playing. I think it’ll probably be similar to last season.”

On if there will be ‘any position group in particular’ that he will be ‘keeping his eye on’:

“Every single position group I’m looking to see. I’m looking to see our players come together. That’s the thing about training camp, you’re going against each other all the time. Now, you get to take the field together as a team. I’m looking forward to seeing all three phases feed off of each other and play the game that we expect to play. Take the field the right way. Then, you’re always going to be looking for those players who are going to perform. I think you see what’s happening on a practice field or in a scrimmage, but now you get to see them play in a real football game. That’s always exciting for a coach and as a team to see your team take shape for this year, and this is our first chance at it.”

On determining which players will play on Saturday:

“I think we’re going to take this injury report today and make our determinations from there. We’re going to try and play the guys, in the preseason, that we feel like need to play. I feel like it can help them. Then, as a result, help our football team. We do that on a case-by-case basis and we do it on a game-by-game basis throughout the preseason. I think that you’ll kind of see that in the first game, and it may be different than the Dallas game. We’ll let you know before game time.”

On the process behind determining which players will play in the preseason:

“That’s a good question. I think that when you look at the preseason as kind of a marathon, in that it’s a long journey to get to the first game, we really want to take the preseason from the game’s perspective and try and evaluate people that we feel like are really establishing themselves for a certain role, or there’s a part of a competition that we really need to see sort of express itself. That’s really what we want out of the preseason. Last year, I think we’ll be very similar to this year from that approach, but who’s actually playing, it may be a little bit different than last season. We really want to make sure that we take advantage of these games to get the right evaluation of these guys, and then the units within our football team heading in towards the regular season.”

On if T Trey Pipkins III and T Storm Norton will play on Saturday:

“Yeah, I think you’ll definitely be able to see both of those guys.”

On if playing the Rams in the regular season ‘changes his approach’ to Saturday’s game:

“Not really. They’re going to have the same approach that we do. Not really.”

On takeaways from last Sunday’s scrimmage that he ‘didn’t take away from first glance on the sideline’:

“I don’t think so. I think we covered it. The quarterback play really stood out. I thought our quarterbacks played really well. I think our quarterbacks operated at a high level, threw the ball extremely well. Then, I thought our skill position players came alive. Our receivers and tight ends, I thought, played high-quality games and gave our quarterbacks a real chance to be accurate. I would say that was what stood out to me in the scrimmage.”

On CB Michael Davis’ development:

“Mike had a really good OTAs. I thought that he improved a lot in the OTAs. We saw a really good mindset within him. Then, I think you can see a really good mindset with him in training camp. I thought training camp, he’s had really good consistency in his performance. He’s improving in all ways, establishing a real role on special teams, which we feel like, adding him as a gunner possibility, we felt like would be a really positive thing for our football team. We’re looking to do that within our whole team, having starters play a meaningful role on special teams, him being one of them. I think he’s improving as a player, and we’re pleased with his progress. I’m certainly excited to see him compete against other people, but he’s been a bright spot in training camp.”

On WR Keenan Allen ‘being a guy that other players look up to’:

“I don’t ever take it for granted. I try to tell our football team, and point it out as much as possible, when you see Keenan practice the way he practices — a guy who’s played so much — and there are a lot of miles on those legs of his, to practice the way that he practices, and then to perform like he does, it’s just a great example for all of us. I think when people are modeling your game, there’s no greater form of respect than when people are trying to model something that you do. Where we’re fortunate on this team is that we have people in a lot of different positions that people are trying to model their game after, Keenan being one of them. When I was at other places, Keenan Allen was always one of the standards in the NFL at receiver, but I think he continues to improve as a player and I think our players see that. It’s not just like, ‘Oh, it’s the same old Keenan.’ No, it’s a better Keenan. Keenan has continued to improve. I really appreciate the example he sets. I think Dre [WR DeAndre Carter] and Josh [WR Joshua Palmer] are great examples of guys that are taking advantage of being with someone that’s going to be looked at as one of the great players of a decade. I’m sure glad to team up with him every day.”

RUNNING BACK JOSHUA KELLEY

On training camp:

“To be honest, it’s going pretty good. I feel like, for me, I’m getting better. I feel like I’m learning. Second year in the offense, things are slowing down. I think, for me, I’m just getting a rhythm. I’m just learning. Nothing is always perfect. I’m continuously growing. I’m not thinking so much. So far, so good.”

On adding weight over the offseason:

“My whole goal this offseason was to become the best football player I could possibly be. It wasn’t to relax, to wind down, to do all sorts of business activities, vacation, it was to become the best player I could be for this year. I evaluated myself. I looked at my strengths and weaknesses. I felt like I could put on some more muscle and some more explosiveness, so I took the program I had seriously and just attacked it. Nutrition was huge. You don’t get this size and this strong without being on nutrition, on top of your recovery. It was a lot of work. Shoutout to Chris Bernard and Jake [Bernard] at Overtime Athletes. They’re located in Tampa, Florida. These guys really had a whole program for me specifically, and I just attacked it. They’re great at what they do. They train a lot of pros.”

On who recommended Overtime Athletes to him:

“We had a guy on this team who, in the past, had worked with them — [former Chargers CB] Rayshawn Jenkins. He’s worked with them a lot. I would always find videos of them on Instagram and YouTube and say, ‘This is some dope stuff.’ Then, I DM’d them on IG, saying, ‘I’m really a fan of this.’ They were like, ‘Alright, we got you. Send me your number. Send me your height, weight and goals.’ It was cool.”

On how his offseason training program ‘translated on to the field’:

“It’s been a huge transition. For me, I’m just like, boom, more explosive, faster, stronger. It’s a big difference. There’s a correlation between the weight room, nutrition, and to the field — injuries, all of that stuff — there’s a correlation to it. It feels good. They got me right. I’m still going, still attacking that program. It doesn’t stop.”

On where he spent his offseason:

“I did it in Cali, mostly because we had OTAs, the offseason. He sent me the program. One day, I would love to go over there, for sure. His gym is crazy.”

On developing in pass protection:

“That’s a good question. I think my first couple years, it was more so figuring out who I am blocking. When you’re out there, you’re seeing so much, you’re seeing safety rotation, you see linebacker leverage. Who do I have? What’s the play? Where are my reads? Now, it’s like, boom, I already know who I have, so I can play faster. I put on some strength, I’m not trying to absorb content. I feel like, when I’m watching tape, I see a lot of guys just go up there and absorb. I’m trying to deliver a blow. I think that’s helped me.”

On Running Backs Coach Derrick Foster ‘simplifying’ the game for the running backs:

“It’s been big. He’s always talked about three big things; close the distance, deliver a punch, and then finish. That’s it. The more distance you have between you and a linebacker, it’s not good, but if you get into his chest, you get into his body fast and you can deliver a punch, then you can create more separation, and the quarterback can get the ball out. That’s huge. If you can’t protect the quarterback, you can’t play running back in the NFL. Simple.”

On Ficken being his third special teams coach in three seasons:

“He had a sit-down with me early in the offseason and said, ‘Look, you’re too good of a player not to be on special teams’ For me, I agreed with him. I felt like I needed to take this phase more seriously, attack it, and just go harder. It’s effort. It mostly comes down to effort and want to. For me, I got my body right, and I was just like, let me study this, let me watch extra tape on special teams. It’s huge. He’s been a great help. He’s simplified things. He was in Minnesota for years, so he knows special teams in the league.”

On contributing on punt coverage as an upback:

“Yeah, something I’ve been working on; footwork, delivering a blow, getting into coverage and making a tackle. I’m excited to showcase that, too.”

On the 'open competition' at the second running back spot:

"I love it. For us, as competitors, honestly and truthfully, this is how you get better and how you know where you stand. He made it clear Day 1. He was like, 'Look, this is a competition.' For me, as a competitor, I love it. I like to challenge myself. I like to try to prove myself. He's made it clear and I'm just trying to embrace it. I'm not worried, necessarily, about the end right now. I'm just worrying about how I get better. Preseason, attacking that, that stuff will take care of itself. You have to embrace it to be competitive, for sure."

On level of excitement heading into first preseason game:

"Huge. I'm really excited about that. We do tag-off, we do hitting against my teammates all the time, but we actually get to go against another team. You don't get to hold back, you get to actually let loose. It doesn't matter if it's three or four reps or 50 reps, I'm excited about it. It's an opportunity that you have to take advantage of."

RUNNING BACK LARRY ROUNTREE III

On differences between his rookie season and second NFL season:

“The draft process it’s a bit of a whirlwind. I would say, as far as last year, you go through the whole process of the draft process and you have to catch up on the offense, but I feel like this offseason, I’ve been completely dialing myself in with the whole offense, special teams, and getting the feel of actually what’s going on. That takes time, coming in as a rookie you’re trying to catch up on everything. Everybody catches on to things at a different time, but this offseason, I’ve been really locked in on everything.”

On the running back group’s reaction to the team drafting another running back:

“I think the whole room, as a whole, we never — all of us — look at it as a pressure deal, it’s more so you being the best version of yourself every day. We all know the qualities that we have within ourselves. All of us play different. [RB] Austin [Ekeler] doesn’t play like J.K. [RB Joshua Kelley]. J.K. doesn’t play like me. [RB] Isaiah [Spiller] doesn’t play like us. We all don’t play like each other. We all have different qualities that we bring to the room, so it’s more so of, every day, we help each other out. We say, ‘You be the best version of you and go out here and play ball.’ But it’s never, I would say, pressure because every day we come in, we go to work and we help each other. That’s not what we do in the running back room, we don’t cause a hostility, we don’t do that. Everybody comes in, everybody helps each other, and when we get out on the field, that’s up to you. But as far as coming in, it’s no pressure.”

On lower-body strength benefiting his game:

“When you put on the pads and go live, I can really express that in my game, like this Saturday. It’s been something I’ve really been trying to get back to you in my game, as far as my senior year of college and all that. I’m in a different league now and you have to know how to make business decisions on when you’re running against certain guys [laughter]. [OLB] Khalil Mack, you might want to juke that guy [laughter]. You don’t want to test him. As fast as my lower body, I’ve really been taking care of it this offseason, working on it, doing a whole bunch of different qualities of lifts that can get it right. I’ve always been a low body guy.”

On the comparison between SEC football and the NFL:

“Honestly, the SEC compared to the NFL, in terms of the guys being big, it’s not even, but it’s there, it’s pretty close. But, as far as the mental aspect, totally different. I would never put the game of the NFL with the SEC. No, totally different, but with the size differential, I’d probably say it’s not too far off. I would say that the SEC and NFL probably pretty close when it comes to size.”

On contributing on special teams:

“Last year, I was returning. I was the off-returner. I was on punt. I was on punt return. I was on everything. I would say now, it’s more so, with our new special teams coordinator, Coach [Ryan] Ficken, he’s really just a great special teams coordinator and makes us play fast. He makes the game, whatever our assignment is, simple. Then, from there, it’s up to us. This year, it’s more so knowing what’s going on on special teams. I’m not a deer in headlights. When you’re a rookie, some guys come in [to the NFL] and they’ve never played special teams. I played special teams in college, but this game is different in the NFL. You have to lock-in. The hidden yardage is in special teams. This year, just being locked in on what’s going on, knowing what we need on punt and what we need on kick return because there is a lot of hidden yardage, and that determines whether you win the game or not.”