

## LOS ANGELES CHARGERS vs. LOS ANGELES RAMS POSTGAME TRANSCRIPTS

Sunday, January 1, 2023 ⚡ SoFi Stadium ⚡ Inglewood, Calif.

### LOS ANGELES CHARGERS HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On the offense ‘finding their rhythm’ today:**

“I think that performance is more indicative of the group that we have on offense. I think you saw kind of a complete performance by our group from start to finish. I felt like our guys really played together today. I thought we played as hard as we’ve played on offense. That was a big goal of ours today, just play harder than we’ve ever played. I thought you saw that in the run game. We finished drives with touchdowns. We were three-for-three in the red area, which we’ve been working really hard at. We were able to get the ball to the deep part of the field. We protected the passer pretty well. I thought we did a good job at the end of the half in two-minute. Still a lot to correct, and that’s a good defense that we played today. I’m proud of the performance because I know that they have a lot of good players and coaches over there. These are going to be the type of defense that we will play moving forward.”

#### **On the performance of the offensive line today:**

“I really liked the way that we ran the football today. We rushed for 192 [yard]s and we had the big splitter. I really felt like we ran the football well in the red zone. It felt like our tight ends were a big factor in the run game today. I thought we were able to mix it up, in terms of the types of run, the types of personnel groupings. Credit to our offensive staff and credit to our guys for just playing really hard today.”

#### **On OLB Joey Bosa’s performance today:**

“I was glad to see him out there. He improves our chances significantly. I think it was very important for him to get out there and play because the players know that they need to football shape, they need to get their pads on, they need to go play, they need to know what it’s like to go in and out, playing with pace. You need to get all that football stuff acclimated so that you can go be your best. It was a good step for him today. I thought that he had a couple of really good rushes out there today. More than anything, it’s just him playing the game and getting that accumulation of snaps so that he can be better next week.”

#### **On OLB Kyle Van Noy and DL Morgan Fox impacting the unit as first-year acquisitions on the defense:**

“All of these guys that we’ve on boarded on this team in free agency, they’re two of them. They’ve helped us significantly, from their performance, and then adding the type of leadership and that type of toughness — the intangibles — that our team needed to be as good as it can be. I thought Foxy [Morgan Fox] and Kyle [Van Noy] played at a high level. I thought [DL] Sebastian [Joseph-Day] was fantastic, and same with [CB] Bryce [Callahan]. Those are guys that we all brought here in free agency, and I think that they’ve been fantastic. Morgan has really given us a lift inside, in terms of pass rush, and then just his flexibility as a player. Kyle, it’s his fourth-straight game with a sack, and it was certainly a huge sack-fumble. They were kind of driving there, and to be able to take points off the board, he’s just playing at a high level. Just thankful for both of those guys.”

**On 'what has led to' Van Noy's four-game streak with a sack:**

"You should ask him that [*laughter*]. From a coach's perspective, I think that he's comfortable. He played in the same system for a long time. There are just little things [*different*]. Football is football to him, but I think that he is getting comfortable. I think the role that he has taken on with this football team was different, maybe, than what we first envisioned because we got cleaned out with injuries and he had to do other jobs. I think that he's really settling in to play on the edge. He's just doing all of the things that he's always done, but I think that he's just in a comfort zone, playing with a lot of confidence. What makes him such a good player is he's a playmaker, he makes plays, on top of all the intangible stuff that he does. I think you've been able to see that in these last four games, where he's making a lot of plays for us that are helping us win."

**On the defense's performance today:**

"The first half, I thought that there were a couple of runs that I didn't like. The toss-crack, it just it ruins your day. You feel like you had a good thing going, and then that toss-crack goes for 40-something [*yards*]. Then, the third down run for 23. Outside of those two runs, I was really happy with how we played. I really love the way we played in the second half. I thought that in the second half, that was the type of team that we've been playing with for the last three games. I was very pleased with our second half performance. I thought we rushed the passer really well today. I thought we covered extremely well, put a roof on the coverage. I felt like we were connected. We competed. There were some runs that weren't up to our standard in the first half. At halftime, I thought that we made some good adjustments to play better in the second half."

**On 'if it ever crosses his mind' what the team would 'look like' without WRs Keenan Allen and Mike Williams:**

"Can't go back in time, for sure. What I like to do is stay in the moment because you guys are all seeing that [*Williams*] catch like I did. I mean, you're not going to see two catches like that by any wideout in the league. He's playing with so much confidence, and you know who he's going against over there, too. He's one of the best in the league. I think that's what we've seen for the last few years out of Mike Williams is that he is one of the premier players in the league. We certainly play a lot better when he touches the ball and touches the ball in the deep part of the field. He was able to make a bunch of big plays for us today. And Keenan [*Allen*], I think Keenan has really come on. He made a bunch of big plays for us today, too. I think you're seeing that vintage Keenan Allen the last couple of weeks, a high volume of production. Those two guys playing off of each other, they give us a really good tandem."

**On an injury update regarding T Trey Pipkins III:**

"Trey Pipkins, kind of the same issue that he's been dealing with, but made it out OK."

**On the blocking efforts by the wide receiver group on RB Austin Ekeler's 72-yard rushing touchdown:**

"We don't get there without it. A big crack by the Z there. It was well blocked up front, but then you have to have your receivers blocking in the run game to get the splitter. It was a decisive run. It was a downhill run. I liked the way that we ran the football today. That was an example of all 11 guys playing their tails off, and a great finish by Austin [*Ekeler*], too, to get into the end zone. It was the longest of his career, from what I'm told."

**On 'catching momentum at the right time' in advance of the postseason:**

"I think that we're playing better. I think that we're improving every time that we go out. A big thing that we've been emphasizing is just the finish in our football team and finding our best here down the stretch. I think that we're finishing a lot better in all phases. I thought, offensively today, that was a step in the right direction, but we're still finding our best as a football team. We're going to take next week and try to take another big step as a team and compete and have it all come together, but it's fun to see the guys starting to play with each other and for one another in that complementary style that you need to be as good as you can be."

**On today's win 'guaranteeing' that the Chargers cannot drop to the No. 7-seed in the AFC Playoffs and if he will 'rest players' in Week 18:**

"I think that we're going to try and go as high as we can go. I think that is going to be our mission, to keep our guys healthy, but we're going to try and attack next week so that we can get that the highest seed that we can get. I think that sets you up the best for success. For us, we really want to play our best football. We'll make sure that if we come out of this game with anything, injury-wise, that we're smart. As you saw in the fourth quarter, we were able to sit Justin [Herbert] and stuff like that. Our mission is to get into the playoffs playing at a high level."

**On his message to Williams after Williams' one-handed catch:**

"It was a wink of total respect. As a pro coach, you get to witness a lot, you get to see a lot of special. But then there are some that are just more special than the rest, and that was certainly one of them."

**On offensive production in the third quarter:**

"I think that our guys came out on a mission in that third quarter. Finished the half with a field goal, a good two-minute drive. Would have liked to have seen a touchdown, but we were able to finish with a field goal. That middle eight so important. You get the ball, and for us to go drive the ball, score the ball, it was really big for our offense. You just really felt like that group, it was a big lift for them, like, 'We scored this thing, and that's kind of off our back now. Now, we can just keep it moving.' That's what I think led to a complete performance, that third quarter leading to an even better fourth quarter, in terms of time of possession. I thought that we really ran the football well."

**On Herbert's level of confidence in Williams:**

"I think every quarterback has to have that player, or players, that when it's tight, that I can throw the football to. People aren't always open in the NFL. He's one of those guys, when he's closely guarded, you can feel good about putting him in a position to make a play. The NFL demands a lot of precision from quarterbacks, and I think that the margin for error increases when you throw it to Mike Williams. I think that that's always a big thing. Then, the other thing is, when you throw it to him, it's not a five-yard pass, it's a 25-plus-yard pass that gets us moving. I think that Mike is one of the best in the game at that."

**On an injury update regarding OLB Chris Rumph II:**

"No, I think that he's OK."

**On Herbert's performance today:**

"I thought that Justin [Herbert] played with good timing. I really liked the red-area touchdown to D.P. [TE Donald Parham Jr.]. We've been practicing that play, that was really good execution there. He was strong with the ball. We were plus-one in the takeaway margin today. We protected the football. He was decisive. I thought that he got the ball to the playmakers. He hit the backs a couple of times, hit [TE] Gerald [Everett]. I thought that we did a good job of mixing the run and the pass — play actions, some keepers. It was a very good performance. I thought that he threw the ball at a high level today."

**On momentum:**

"I think that every week is a new week. I think that there's momentum in the game. I think that there's confidence, more than anything. I think that you have to do every week in the NFL is you have to create it, each and every week, all over again. I think it's certainly easier to do that when you win and you play well. I think that when you play well, you kind of earn more confidence to start out the week. We're going to have to start over next week against Denver. As you guys saw, they played Kansas City really tight. They have a really good defense. The offensive, it looked like they played pretty well. We're going to have to play at a high level on the road. Again, that word — finish — that's what we're going to try and do next week."

**On the benefit of building a lead and letting backups see action today:**

"I thought that we were able to take a look at some guys. I thought that that was an advantage for us. It felt good to play a game like that, where you could take a look at some guys, defensively and offensively. We were able to get Justin [Herbert] out of the game, get [QB] Chase [Daniel] some snaps. I think that was important for Chase to get some snaps. I thought that Chase did a nice job of operation, when he was in there, too. We got [RB] Larry Rountree [III] some carries. We've needed everybody in order to make it to this point, and we're going to need everybody moving forward."

**On the offense's performance in the run game today:**

"I think that this was a good start. For us, I think that this is almost like a reset for us, because I think that that performance is the vision of how you want to run the football. I thought we were able to do it with our running backs, and it took everybody — it's not like we ran the ball one specific way. I thought we had good mixture. I thought that our tight ends and receivers did a nice job blocking. To get the explosions, too, I think was important. To get a big-time run, that was something that we were searching for. As you guys saw in the Cleveland game, when you can get that gash run, that really helps your team. Certainly, a good game for us in that phase."

**On if the last two weeks were 'playoff-type wins':**

"I think that we've been practicing really well. I think that each phase has taken a lot of pride in where the improvements need to be made. I think that that's really been our focus, is where are these improvements need to be made so that we can go put it on tape. That defense that we just played is really, really good, in my opinion — really, really good. I thought that last week's defense that we played, Indianapolis, I think that they have a really good defense. I think that we're continuing to improve and play against quality competition. Special teams for us, all year, as you guys know, has been the steadiest part of our football team. I'm really proud of that. Our special teams continues to improve. We're going to need it to keep it going so that we can be as good as we can be."

## **LOS ANGELES CHARGERS QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**

### **On the offense's production in the third quarter:**

"I thought that it was good for us to play consistent football on offense. All four quarters, I thought that we moved the ball pretty well. We did a lot of good things up front. We made some plays down the field. Overall, I thought that it was a great performance."

### **On Williams' one-handed catch:**

"I don't know how anyone else does anything like that. He is about as special as it gets. I wasn't able to watch the replay on the videoboard, and so we got up to the line of scrimmage just to get a play off to make sure that maybe he was in bounds, maybe he wasn't. I'm definitely going to have to watch that one again."

### **On 'if it is important to have momentum going into playoffs':**

"I think that it is always important to be playing your best football at the end of the year. There is still plenty of room for improvement for us offensively, defensively and special teams. I really liked what I saw from the defense today, the special teams as well, all three phases. I thought there were some good things, and we'll watch the film tomorrow, We'll keep looking to get better heading into the next one."

### **On the run game:**

"That is what we're much more used to seeing from those guys. [RB] Austin Ekeler, [RB] Josh Kelley, they have been running the ball well all year. It's great to see those long plays, those explosive plays in the run game. I think that opens up our play-action passes. I think the offensive line have done a great job all year. Just a lot of respect for those guys battling today."

### **On Ekeler's 72-yard touchdown run and the impact that has on the entire offense:**

"It's great for our offense. If we are able to run the ball and throw the ball, I think that is the balanced attack that we are going for. We think really highly of our offensive line, of our running backs. To see that today, we're not surprised by the success at all."

### **On 'momentum increases' due to plays made by Allen and Williams**

"It's huge knowing you have those guys out there. They are two of the best receivers in the game. To have those guys out there on the field, it opens up so much more for our offense and we know that on third down, we have to find those guys because they are going to beat man coverage. They are going to understand where to sit in zone coverage. They are really smart. They are athletic and talented. To have those guys one the field, it definitely helps us."

### **On offensive adjustments made at halftime:**

"We just talked about keeping the ball moving. I thought that we did some really good things in the first half and the offensive line was battling. Had some explosive plays, but to keep that going into the third quarter and fourth quarter, to see those explosive plays happen in the second half, I thought that was great for our offense."

### **On if playing against Rams DB Jalen Ramsey and Rams LB Bobby Wagner was like a 'chess match':**

"Yeah, they are two of the best in the game. To go up against those guys, it's always a great opportunity. I have so much respect for them as defenders, as teammates, as people. They are tough to play against. We have had to watch a lot of film on those guys to have our best week."

### **On if the last two games of the season are 'tune-up' games:**

"I think it's always a great opportunity for us to play football and to get better. We attacked this week with the same mentality as every week. It's the most important game because it's the next one. It's the same mindset this week. We'll watch the film on this one. We'll get better. We'll start game planning for Denver. It's always a great opportunity to keep playing football."

**On Ekeler:**

“He is incredibly talented. He works harder than anyone, so he deserves everything and all of the hard work that he put in over the past couple of years, it has been an honor to be his teammate. To be able to give him the ball, whether it’s handing it off or throwing it to him, something special is going to happen.”

**On ‘if he is looking ahead to the potential of claiming the fifth seed’:**

“No. I think we’re just focused on each game as it comes. The next one is the most important one, so whatever happens, happens.”

**On Head Coach Brandon Staley:**

“[Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley has been awesome the past couple of years. It has been such an honor to play for him. He has the respect of everyone in the locker room. He still emphasizes the same three rules of commitment, competition, and relationships and he has done such a great job of being himself and being genuine. Everyone wants to follow and play for him.”

**On the potential of playing for a higher seed or resting next week:**

“We love playing football. Every opportunity to play football is a great opportunity. I completely trust our coaching staff, our front office, whatever they decide. I love playing football with these guys, so whatever happens, happens.”

**On if the performance from the offense today was the unit’s ‘best performance this season’:**

“I thought that there were a lot of good things from our offense today. There were a couple of penalties that we can clean up, maybe some third downs that we could have converted. One drive in the red zone that stalled out and we kicked a field goal. I think we could have been cleaner on that one. A lot of good things and definitely stuff to watch tomorrow.”

**On the areas he has improved in this season:**

“I think that I have a better understanding of the offense. I think we have done a much better job of diving deeper into the offense and all of the things that we can do. Switching protections, changing plays and kills like that. There is still plenty of room for improvement for me as a quarterback — limiting turnovers, converting on third downs. There is a lot of room.”

**On if he ‘gets more comfortable each game played’:**

“I hope so. I think experience is the best teacher. Every game that we go out there, there is an opportunity to learn. They are not always going to go your way, but to watch the film the next day, be real with yourself, be real with the team and get better.”

## **LOS ANGELES RAMS HEAD COACH SEAN McVAY**

### **Opening statement:**

“Congratulations to the Chargers. They did a great job. I think that’s a really good football team, you could really see. I thought the way we came out — our guys were ready to go. I liked the way we were able to establish the run. I [would have] liked to be able to finish some of those red area possessions with touchdowns. The defense battled tough, but they made their plays. [RB Austin] Ekeler is a really good back, I thought [Justin] Herbert was outstanding, and some of the plays [WR] Mike Williams made. I was really encouraged with [Rams RB] Cam Akers. I thought there were some good things in the run game. [Rams QB] Baker [Mayfield] made some good plays. [Rams WR] Van Jefferson also showed up. Just didn’t quite do enough. There was very small margin for error and when it ended up getting out of hand, it kind of got out of hand for us. When you get into some of those known passing situations, that was where we ended up struggling and had some miscommunication. Make no excuses — those guys did a good job. They deserved to win. Hats off to [Head Coach] Brandon [Staley] and his group. We’ll look to have a good week of preparation and finish this season off the right way at Seattle.”

### **On the Chargers’ running game:**

“They mixed up some different varieties and they were able to get some good surges and some good push. Obviously, the explosive [play] that Ekeler had for 72 [yards] ends up — I don’t want to say skewing the stats because they had good command, you don’t want to take away any credit they deserve — but things can look different when you have a 72-yarder. Not look different, but that’s a big part of why they ended up having success. It’s a really good offense. I thought they mixed it really well and they have great players.”

### **On ‘if he had any flashbacks’ facing Staley’s defense today:**

“Not really, no.”

### **On what makes Staley ‘a good defensive coach’:**

“He does a great job being able to mix it up. Different personnel groupings, different feel for the flow of the game, different types of ways of activating five rushers and still being able to play sound coverage on the back end. You guys know the amount of respect I have for Brandon [Staley]. He does a great job and he does an excellent job of adjusting the scheme to their players. Like I mentioned earlier in the week, there’s still a foundational philosophy that he has, and an understanding of the game from an ‘All- 22’ [perspective] that’s as good as anybody I’ve been around. Then, his ability to be able to say ‘Alright, how do I want to utilize [OLB Khalil] Mack and [OLB Joey] Bosa and [LB Drue] Tranquill and [CB Bryce] Callahan. Obviously, when [Chargers safety] Derwin [James] is playing, what that looks like?’ I think he’s done a great job at the back end. They’re peaking at the right time and they’ll be fun to watch in the playoffs.”

### **On Rams RB Cam Akers:**

“There’s always going to be some things you can look at it, but I just think it’s the way that he’s creating when there isn’t anything there — the explosiveness. I think you’re seeing a complete back. He’s making plays in the pass game. There will be some things that we can continue to clean up because of the standards that we have for him, whether that be playing without the ball. I think Cam [Akers] deserves a ton of credit for the way he’s hitting his stride right now, the way that he’s playing. Hopefully, we finish off the regular season the right way and he can use this to be able to build some momentum into the offseason because I’ve been really pleased with Cam.”

### **On ‘why there’s been a difference’ in Akers’ performance from earlier in the season:**

“I think he’d be better equipped to answer that. I think some of it, too, is opportunities. I think when you look at it, I think guys are doing a better job playing around him in the run game. I think we’ve been able to mix up some different things variety wise. We’re getting some different personnel groupings. You’re seeing him be able to get to the second level, sometimes clean, and if not, when his shoulders are square to the line of scrimmage, he’s a pretty special back. I think it’s like anything else. Confidence is a really powerful thing. He’s playing with a lot of confidence. He’s getting more opportunities. I think [Rams Assistant Head Coach/Tight Ends Coach] Thomas Brown has done an outstanding job. You guys know what a great coach I think he is, as well.”

**On if Rams DT Greg Gaines was limited and how that affects what the Rams are able to do up front with other starters out:**

“It does. That’s kind of been standard operating procedures for us this year. Really, I think [Rams Defensive Line Coach/Run Game Coordinator] Eric Henderson has done a great job of developing the depth. You see some young guys who are playing where there’s been some good things and then there’s some growth pains we end up going through and that’s really for our team in general. Overall, the way the guys continue to battle — it’s Greg, it’s [Rams DT] Aaron Donald, now it’s [Rams DT] A’Shawn Robinson, all those. When those guys are missing, those are your three guys that really solidify the interior parts of the line. And [Rams DT Marquise] Copeland, he was able to play today, but he wasn’t quite like himself just with some of the limitations on the ankle. You don’t make any excuses. We just have to coach better. We are capable of playing a little bit better and we’ll see if we can do that next week.”

**On Rams DB Nick Scott’s injury status:**

“I think it was just a stinger. You look at what a stud he is. He finished out one of the last snaps, making a big-time tackle on the sideline and it’s just kind of hanging there. That’s been the kind of warrior and competitor he is. I love Nick Scott.”

**On if he draws any similarities with balance of Chargers’ offense this year and Rams’ offense last year:**

“Yeah, like I’ve always said, I’m a big fan of the game, so you’re aware of what they’ve done. I thought they were an excellent offense last year. They haven’t run the football maybe as much as they did last year, but today they did a phenomenal job of being able to commit to it and doing a great job of having excellent production. They’re getting healthy at the right time, too. I know they had some injuries where they didn’t have all the same guys in the lineup. When you can put out some of those guys that they’re playing with, when you’ve got Herbert at the switch, when you’ve got Ekeler at running back, they’re having a little bit more continuity up front, and then those skill players around them — that’s a really tough outfit. They’re very well-coached. I think [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] and Brandon — those guys do a great job, and [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day, of being able to put their guys in the right spots and accentuate their skillsets and that’s what I think great coaches do.”

**On his evaluation of Rams QB Baker Mayfield’s performance:**

“I thought he did some really good things. Like I said, I think the margin for error was really small. There are some things in some of the known passing situations that we can clean up and provide clarity for him on how we want to really be able to get through the down, but I think he’s a great competitor. I really like the way that he’s gone about this. Really, I’ve enjoyed working with him and very similar to what the temperature and tone has been, looking forward to finishing this off the right way. I can’t say enough about how impressed I’ve been with everything he’s done in such a short amount of time, and he’s a stud.”



## **LOS ANGELES RAMS QUARTERBACK BAKER MAYFIELD**

### **On 'playing with a very small margin of error' in today's game:**

"Yes, from the get-go. I think, just that close on a few things. Early on in the game, when you are playing an offense like theirs, it's tough to get behind. We didn't make it easy on our defense. We didn't sustain drives and stay on the field. Converted a few third downs, but not enough. I thought our guys ran the ball extremely well. I thought that was the one positive that I can just go out and outrightly say. We ran the ball. Just in the pass game, we have to make more plays and I take blame for a lot of that. Take the easy completions when they are there and I think I will go back on the tape and, like we said, the small margin error and I think we'll see that there was a lot there for the taking, but we didn't take advantage of it and they did."

### **On Rams RB Cam Akers:**

"He ran the ball extremely hard. When he sees the hole and the crease he wants to hit, he hits it hard and he put his shoulder down today and ran tough like he has the past couple of weeks. There were a few runs where he just made people flat-out miss. He is doing it all right now for us. He is picking up blitzes. Appreciate the way Cam is playing."

### **On the Chargers' third-down pressures:**

"They did a good job mixing it up. Even when we went tempo, they had their pressures pre-aligned and pre-determined. They just did a good job. They did a good job of passing stuff off once we got into their territory. They brought some zero blitz. We just didn't make the plays when they brought the pressure and didn't take advantage of it."

### **On completing a pass to Rams WR Van Jefferson:**

"I wouldn't say it's just based on the connection right there. It was really, in that short time period, thinking about running the ball, but I just saw Van clear it. He did a good job flatting off and being friendly for me. It is just one of those balls, put it up there for him, make a play. I'm glad he caught it because in hindsight we would have been pretty mad if I didn't take off and run. Van is making a lot of good plays for us."

### **On 'what he hopes to accomplish' next week against the Seahawks:**

"Not sure how the playoff standings look right now, but I am sure we are going to be walking into a great atmosphere there in Seattle. For me, improving on this game. I am not real happy with how I played. Obviously, whenever you lose, it's not real good. I want to improve and end the season on a high note, something I can be proud of and just continue to lead and be the same guy every day. Just want to play better for these guys."

### **On 'why he isn't happy about how he played':**

"I think there were some easy completions that just to take in the quick game that I think we took advantage of last week compared to this week. I will be thinking about it until we play again. I'll go back and look at the tape like I said, but I think there were some easy plays there to just get the ball in our guys' hands."