

Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Wednesday, August 10, 2022 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR RYAN FICKEN

Opening statement:

“Good afternoon. That was a really good practice today. These last couple of days, we’ve had some good ones. Coming out here, I think that these guys have been dialed in, working hard. Have to give a lot of credit to these core guys and the specialist. They’re putting in the work and preparing themselves ready to go for not only the Rams, but also leading up to the season.”

On LS Josh Harris’ leadership traits:

“He’s doing a great job in terms of being a leader. He comes in and he has years of experience, he knows how it needs to be done at this level. He’s had a lot of great success here, in terms of in the league, as a snapper. That’s one of the biggest reasons why we wanted to go ahead and go after him and bring him in here. A lot of guys rely on him, especially in terms of protection, just seeing the things that he sees, talking the same language. He’s been great, just being that constant guy that we can rely on and depend on every time it was out there on the field.”

On ‘the impact of having an All-Pro player at long snapper’:

“A lot of guys are excited about it. We can rely on them to be able to do his job. He has that experience. He’s been battle-tested, so to speak. We feel very confident in him taking that role. We feel that we are secure at that spot, as long as he continues to compete. He’s competing, not only with himself out here but almost everyone around the league, too. It’s been great to have him here.”

On the importance of executing on special teams in preseason games:

“I think it’s very important, these preseason games, but these practices, we can’t go and take these lightly. They’re getting evaluated not only in these preseason games, but out in practice, in the meetings, just the small things of being where you’re supposed to be, so they’re getting evaluated in everything we do. We’re trying to create depth at all positions, it doesn’t matter where it is. We have to make sure that they’re ready to go against the Rams here in all of these situations, making sure that they’re prepared so they can go out and execute and have the most success that they can have out there on the field, because that’s what we want, we want them to have success out there, not only for themselves, but for our team as a whole so that we can build that confidence as we lead up and make these decisions little bit more difficult.”

On evaluating players during practice when they’re not live tackling:

“You can get the movement skills, you see how they work in space, because a lot of special teams it is in space; how they move, are they doing their assignment correctly, are they where they’re supposed to be, because nine times out of 10, if they just get lined up correctly, they have an opportunity to be successful on that play. There are a lot of things leading up to that. Then, seeing how the technique and fundamentals transition, in terms of these full reps, just seeing it carry over. That’s what we’re trying to do, with us, is just trying to just eliminate, trim all of the fat, make it really simple for these guys so that they can go in and have their athleticism take over as they’re out there, but have confidence as they’re playing.”

On the competition at gunner on punt coverage:

"I think it's a great competition, in terms of that group. They understand the importance of it, our team does, our organization understands how important it is to have that success in the gunner spot. That's why we're rotating. We have a very deep group, in terms of some of these young guys coming in, the veterans that are here contributing. I think it's been a great challenge and competition throughout the whole training camp, and previously in the offseason. But it's been a major emphasis with this organization and this team to go ahead and make sure we solidify that. You don't want just to have one or two gunners going into the season, you want to have a good mix of four or five guys. We know that throughout the whole year, things happen, and we got to be able to call the next man up. Those guys are the first weapon, in terms of punt, going down there to defend against the return. Very important."

On if any player has 'separated themselves' at gunner:

"They have to think through the whole process. There's a lot that goes into it, just in terms of the rules. There are a lot of nuances with these rules, in terms of special teams, especially on punt; getting aligned correctly, having a plan, see them work through all the mental gymnastics before they even take an actual, full rep. Then, working the technique that we're talking about, releasing with speed, not dancing at the line of scrimmage, pad level, using your hands, being violent, and then covering the kick. That's just part of it, but now we have to go ahead and cover the kick against the elite returners in the league that we have to face. Those guys are typically the better athletes on the field, so we have to make sure that we're full stride and speed, that we're throttling down, attacking the hip, all of those things were evaluating all of that, and how they go ahead and make those decisions in split seconds. As a group, I think it's been a great competition. I think they all are doing more than we've expected, not that the bar was low, but I thought there would be great and I think they're doing a great job. I think that they're chomping at the bit for this competition. You have [CB Michael] Davis, Sam [CB Asante Samuel Jr.], [CB Tevaughn] Campbell that was getting some of these reps before he went down, and then the young guys with [DB Deane] Leonard and [DB Ja'Sir] Taylor. It's a deep group and you can see them flourish a little bit with this competition."

On FB Zander Horvath's development on special teams:

"I like his athleticism. His size, he's really added some weight coming into the camp. He's a very mature rookie. He played teams, we liked him on teams when we were evaluating him in the [draft] process. He understands football, he's not just a fullback on offense, he is a football player. He has a way to increase his value. He's out here competing with the other fullback, with [FB Gabe] Nabers, at that position. I think that he's done a great job, so far."

On Horvath's defensive background:

"He definitely has that defensive mentality. But again, he's not just a fullback, just taking on linebackers. He's a football player. He has those natural tendencies, in terms of being a defensive linebacker. You see that translate over. He has natural football movement, which we're excited about."

CORNERBACK MICHAEL DAVIS

On the impact of CB J.C. Jackson:

“The impact for J.C., I think, in our secondary is that he’s energetic. He’s a Florida boy. All Florida boys are energetic, they’re wild like that. He brings a wildness to the team.”

On Florida players bringing a ‘wildness’:

“They do — D.J. [S Derwin James Jr.], Zant [CB Asante Samuel Jr.]”

On competing against the offense:

“You’re going against the best. I think our offense is one of the better offenses in the league, so it’s best-on-best. We have our days, they have her days. I think that’s the point of competition, just to keep grinding, keep making each other better.”

On his approach to the level of competition in the secondary:

“I think competition brings camaraderie. When you compete, you make everybody around you better. We’re all still friends, so that’s just part of the game, I think. I think that it just elevates us all the way around.”

On improving as a unit:

“We’ve locked in. We’ve bought into what [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley has been talking about. We’ve bought into D.A. [Secondary Coach Derrick Ansley] and [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo Hill. We’re coming together as a unit. I think that’s the main thing. You play as one and you win as one.”

On seeing action at gunner on punt coverage:

“It’s been pretty fun. I haven’t done gunner in a while, since maybe my second or third year in the league. It’s been fun. I’m still killing at it, so it’s pretty cool [*laughter*]. It’s something that I’m comfortable with.”

On what he worked on in the offseason:

“Every year, just being consistent. I think that’s the main thing, especially as a cornerback, you have to be consistent, can’t be up and down. I think I’ve worked a lot more on that this offseason. Just steady grinding.”

On why the coaches have had him practice at Money in the Dime sub-package:

“I think just because I’m big and strong, and I’m fast. It’s a different position, but I like it. I think that it just adds more value to me, I guess. We’ll see how it goes. I’m liking it.”

On the challenges of covering the slot compared to outside corner:

“It’s a challenge. You’re covering bigger people, you’re probably guarding more tight ends. You’re on the edge on every run, so more physicality. I like it, though.”

On building off of last season:

“Last year, for me, was a year with a lot of distractions, on the field and also off of the field. I think that came into play into my game, like inconsistency. I think we’re past that. Effort, I think it’s all about effort this year.”

On distractions from last season:

“Distractions in my personal life, my previous girlfriend. Whatever happens off of the field comes onto the field, and vice-versa. I just think that last year was filled with distractions. This year, I’m able to eliminate all of the distractions go back to my myself, the way that I’ve been doing it before last year. We’re going up from here.”

On increased comfort with the scheme:

“I’m a lot more comfortable this year. Last year, I didn’t feel like I had a grasp on the defense, but this year, I do. It’s a team sport. In [former Chargers Defensive Coordinator] Gus Bradley’s defense, it’s more playing by yourself, and in this defense, you have to play with everybody around you. I’m getting more used to playing with my teammates.”

On 'how good' the secondary can be this season:

"Phenomenal. We can be top two and not two, just like Drake said [*laughter*]."

On increased depth at cornerback:

"Yeah. There's more depth. With more depth, there's more competition, and that brings the best out of us."

On S Derwin James Jr.'s contract situation:

"I try to keep that separate from what's going on on the field. That's his business, him and upstairs. Whatever happens, happens. We'll keep riding it out."

On if he will play on Saturday against the Rams in the first preseason game:

"You'd have to ask Coach Staley. I don't know."

On if he wants to play:

"Yeah. If he wants me to, I'll play."

CORNERBACK ASANTE SAMUEL JR.

On his training camp thus far:

"It's going well. The offense and the defense, we've just been competing and trying to get better each and every day. I'm just focusing on one day at a time."

On growth through competing against the offense:

"I think it makes us better because we're going against one of the best quarterbacks in the league, three of the best receivers in the league. I just try to go out there and use my technique against those guys, see what I can do and what I can't do, just perfect my craft."

On the addition of OLB Khalil Mack:

"It is definitely going to be a big difference with him there, just him putting pressure on the quarterback, him stopping the run. He's a great player and a great leader on the team."

On entering his second season after his first full offseason:

"I feel more confident and more calm as I'm going through my progressions, as I'm going through the calls. Just learning different things about the NFL. I definitely feel more confident this year."

On what he's learned about the NFL:

"Little things; formation tells, receiver splits, the receiver you're going against. Little things of that nature."

On how he feels physically:

"I feel great right now. It's camp, so you have little nicks and bruises, but other than that, I feel good."

On conversations with his father, former NFL CB Asante Samuel, following his rookie season:

"He just tried to tell me to keep doing what I've been doing all my life. Learn as you go. Sometimes, you have to learn things on your own in the NFL, because he could tell me a lot of things, but once I go out there, it's kind of different. I just have to learn and do my own play."

On adding CB J.C. Jackson and CB Bryce Callahan and how they have impacted his development:

"It's been good. I've been asking those guys little things about technique and scheme, just trying to ask as many questions as I can, gain knowledge from them and become a better teammate and player with those guys."