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Chargers Week 2 Media Availability

Friday, September 17, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On CB Chris Harris Jr.'s injury status:

"He finished the game; he fell on his shoulder. He woke up sore. We're just trying to be careful with it. Range of motion, strength, just making sure he's safe and sound before he goes back out there. Nothing long-term, but we're just being careful with him."

On T Bryan Bulaga's timetable for return:

"It's hard to tell right now. I don't think it's going to be long term right now — prognosis is good from the long-term standpoint. We felt that the minimum of three [weeks] is where we wanted to go with it."

On Bulaga's injury:

"It's the back. It's his core muscle. His groin faired quite well in the game [against Washington.] He just got folded on a run play. But we're optimistic."

On if T Storm Norton will start at RT on Sunday:

"Yes."

On which player will fill Harris' position:

"We'll pick up the slack with a combination of DBs. [S] Alohi Gilman is playing some safety for us, and then we also have [DB] Trey Marshall who'll be active in the game. [CB] Kemon [Hall], some of those other guys. We'll merge. We're excited to see those other guys play. The good news is that all those guys got a lot of work through the preseason and through the first game. Excited to watch those guys compete."

On CB Asante Samuel Jr. potentially moving inside to cover the slot in nickel:

"It's on the table. We really feel comfortable with him outside right now, trying to get him in a comfort zone. He certainly can do that, but we like him outside right now. We could do that eventually, but not at this moment."

On defensive changes within sub-packages:

"We're just going to try and put our best combinations of DBs out there. We feel like with [DB] Trey [Marshall] with Lo [S Alohi Gilman], we've got guys that can play safety, that can play money. We're training [DB] Mark Webb [Jr.] to play star money safety. Right now, with where we're at, I feel like this is our best combination of guys."

On DB Trey Marshall:

"It's been great to translate what's new for him. There is a lot that's new in terms of language. And there are a couple things from a technical aspect that are new for him, like, 'Hey, Trey, this is what's different about where we were.' What's awesome is that me and [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo [Hill] were both with him, so it's an easy translation. He's also has [S] Derwin [James Jr.], who he's very close with. It's been fun to unpack that. I'm excited to see Trey go out there and compete. He definitely helps us."

On DL Jerry Tillery:

"I think Jerry's playing really, really hard. We were able to move him throughout the formation, which was a goal of ours. I feel like he had some of that almost-production in the rush. We're excited where he's at. His weight's really good right now. His body is good. He's active. I feel like we've got a good rotation going with him. He played a really good number of snaps in the game. I think he just continues to improve, gets more comfortable within our scheme, positioning him in the right ways. Pass rush too. It wasn't a game last week where it was a pure-on rush sort of game; a third down, we're ahead-type game. We had to play it straight up and he's playing rugged and tough in the run front. I'm excited to keep working with him. He's improving every day and he's totally invested in what we're doing. He's in great shape and I think the way he's changed his body is allowing him to make a lot more plays in the run game and play the way we want to play. I'm excited to see him keep going."

On DL Justin Jones listed as doubtful for Sunday:

"We've got Cov [DL Christian Covington], who's been doing a good job as a swing guy for us. We're going to make the decision here in the next 24 hours on who's going to be that guy that would be up, whether it's Joey G [DL Joe Graziano], [DL] Forrest [Merrill], [DL] Breiden [Fehoko], probably one of those three will be who's up on gameday."

On S Nasir Adderley:

"Nas has done well. We were being more careful than anything with the hip flexor-groin thing, but he's practiced well. He looked good out there today. He's going to go on Sunday."

On the number of team captains:

"We wanted the guys who had the most representative votes. However many it was, whether it was four, five, six or seven. When there was a clear separation between the last guy and the next line, that's how I wanted to do it. Those guys that are our captains, those guys got the most votes and then there was a gap after that. I feel like it's well-represented on both sides of the ball, and in the kicking game. I couldn't be prouder of those guys. I feel like those guys are definitely the group I would've picked. To be selected by your peers, your teammates, that's always the highest honor you can receive within a team, because the respect of your teammates is what you're hoping for. I'm so excited about those guys leading our team because they've earned it."

On if G/T Michael Schofield III will be active Sunday:

"I don't think so. I just met him today. I think that's a stretch for this week, but we're excited to have him and get to work with him."

On the nickel sub-package without CB Chris Harris Jr.:

"We've certainly have other guys that can do that job. [S] Derwin [James Jr.] does it at a high level. I think that we have to go into this game plan assessing, 'Hey, down and distance, time and score. Who gives us the best chance?' That group of guys that's been training with Chris and Derwin. We feel like we have a good number of guys that can go in and handle the job. Whether it's [CB] Kemon [Hall], T.C. [CB Tevaughn Campbell], [CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.], [DB] Mark Webb [Jr.]. Those guys have all been training in there. More than anything for us, we feel good about our depth there. And then as it relates to getting our best combinations out there, [S] Derwin [James Jr.], Lo [S Alohi Gilman] and Nas [S Nasir Adderley] are our best five with Asante and Vato [CB Michael Davis] out wide."

On who will be the backup QB on Sunday:

"We have not determined that yet."

SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR DERIUS SWINTON II

On K Tristan Vizcaino's performance against Washington:

"He made them all, so that's a good thing, right? He made them all. I try to keep it simple. He made them all, and then kickoffs were good. I think he got under the first one but we got what we wanted from it. Good hang time on it, good hang distance, what we were looking for direction, going both ways, kicking down the middle. He had a good day. All in all, whenever you make all your kicks, the ones that count, it's a good day."

On WR KJ Hill Jr.'s performance on punt return:

"I try to tell those guys, try not to second guess them. I would love to say we did with our scheme. We forced them to pull a ball that he didn't want to hit, and that is his bad ball, to the right. He pulls it. The ball was to the right. We have to trust that he's going to make the right decision. We would love to say, 'Hey, get in front of the ball,' but with footballs, they only take on true bounce because they're not round. So that one true bounce, he couldn't get it. He had to decide [of not wanting] to get hit with it because the gunner was on top of him. You know it sucked as far as field position-wise, but it's better than a turnover. You trust their decision-making with a bad ball like that. The second one, he will even tell you he would try to run up and get that one, try to save some field position. He could have gotten a few more yards, but I always tell those guys, we have to trust your decision-making. When we force guys into bad punts, like, 'Hey, you make the right decision', and he did in that situation because it's just a tough one. It's 50-50. Is it going to hit me? He doesn't want to force a turnover, which we don't want to give them the ball back, so he had to make that decision in that case on the first one."

On who could replace S Nasir Adderley as the primary kick returner if Adderley is not active on Sunday:

"Yeah, as always, we will see when we get out there. You can give me your recommendations and we can see who's out there we have one more day of practice. I try to say it, I just can't give you anything. I would love recommendations. Me and [Assistant Special Teams Coach] Mayur [Chaudhari] are taking recommendations. We have a comment box that has a hole in it that's covered outside our office, so just let us know at any point when you want to give recommendations and comments. We will see who runs out there. We're waiting until 90 minutes before, but, obviously, we have a plan that is in place, but we don't want to give that away. The guys that we have back there during the week are all capable of running our returns at a high level. We hope Nas is healthy and that he can get out there. We will see what happens, but if it's not, then we can put different guys out there. We will be ready to go."

On if Adderley was fatigued late in the game due to playing extensively on defense:

"No. I think if you look at the last kickoff return that he had, it was his best one. He made it happen. He hit it full speed. We unfortunately got a block in the back penalty, but he really did not look like he was fatigued to me. When they pulled him from the game, we put [RB] Larry [Rountree III] out there. To me, Nas even wanted to go back there again if he wasn't going to go out. He never came to me and said he was fatigued or anything, I really liked where he was. I liked his decision-making. You look at the returns, they were there, it's just a matter of we have to sustain the blocks a little better, but he had a very good day for us as a returner. Larry was back there for the touchback and made the right decision. so I liked what I saw. I didn't see anything fatigue-wise on my end."

On the punt and kickoff coverage units' performance against Washington:

"I thought it was good. I think any time you can hold a return unit under 15 yards on any return, I think that is positive. They would even tell you that they want the long one back, the first punt back. [P] Ty [Long] would tell you the location wasn't great, but we rallied to it. Kickoff-wise, if you look at it, the first one was good. People will say, 'Well, it was at the 26 yard line.' Well, it was a 16-yard return. He got under it. and then the second one we kind of had a pile up on Aisle 3. You watch it there, we got piled up. The returner did a good job of cutting off of that. That was the one that we probably want back. Then the last one, J.J. [RB Justin Jackson] just made a fanatic play. We talked about our coverage, 11 in the outside, bringing the inside out there, and he did a great job. The guys had really good energy. I like what we had to build off of game one. I had an old coach tell me, ;The biggest improvement during the season is between Week 1 and Week 2.' We will see where we go from there, but I really like where we are at. We rotated a lot of guys in the interior there, so it was good,"

On RB Justin Jackson's two special teams tackles:

"Yeah, two tackles. When I got here, I went back and watched the New Orleans Saints game last year, when he was the personal protector on punt. He's a guy that just finds the ball. They didn't block him and they will probably block him this week, so he had a good day. He is a guy that has a nose for the football. You saw [LB] Drue Tranquil go down there on kickoff return. He's the tip of the spear. He took a shot, made the returner stop his speed, then J.J. was able to make the tackle, so it's all the guys playing into it on top of the kick."

On the punt where Long felt the location 'wasn't great':

"We were going directional and it [was in the middle of the field. We were going directional and it was in the middle of the field. We can still cover it, but he knows that it gives them an advantage. I can get into the geometry of a triangle and the long end of the triangle, you want the ball to fly in the long end. We can talk about obtuse angles, too, if you want to, the Pythagorean Theory and all those things that your math teacher in 5th grade would love for us to talk about, but he would tell you that when we come with angles, that's why it wasn't a great punt. We want the football to travel the longest edge of the triangle that we are trying to cover down there. When it's in the middle of the field, the gunners are covering the long edge, so it really wasn't advantageous for us from the coverage aspect, but we rallied to it. You really see guys getting down there taking shots on the returner. These guys have two good returners. [Cowboys WRs] Cedrick Wilson and CeeDee Lamb are two of the really good guys in this league that really make you work for what you get. They are looking to dip into that. They will put two of them back there, they have a throw-back that they will do. They'll have 29 [Dallas CB C.J. Goodwin] go back. We are getting ready for all that stuff so that we are ready for that test."

On if they would ever punt it down the middle of the field

"There are times that we will do a lot of things. There are times that we will punt it out of bounds, punt in the middle. We will see what the game dictates. I think you've seen [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley and how we do our scheme, it's all based off the game that week, what does the returner do well and what we do well. Some weeks we will be directional, some weeks we will be hanging it down the middle, if they have certain things. There will be times in certain games where will be like, 'OK, what are they doing here?' There will be times like, 'OK, I think I know what they are doing there.' We have so many things. Ty [Long] being as good as he is, we have the availability to do those things."

On Cowboys K Greg Zuerlein missing one field goal try and one point after touchdown attempt in Week 1:

"As a kicker, there are waves in the game. There are things that you go through. I can't speak to what happened. I watched the game, obviously, the film and everything, but there is more than just his foot hitting the ball. I think he is a guy that has been a vet and that has bounced back. This happened earlier in his career, too. He has had times when the ball is just going different ways on him, then he makes like five, 10 [field goals] in a row. I think he's working through that. I think you watch him as a kickoff guy, he's still effective at that. I think he presents a weapon of surprise on the sides. I think he's still a weapon with squibs and pop kicks. He's more than just a field goal kicker. We do focus on those things, missing those kicks and making those kicks, but at the end of the day, he has value for them. He can do a lot of those specialty things that [Cowboys Special Teams Coordinator John] Fassel wants him to do. I wouldn't be surprised if Fassel and did a surprise onside kick on the first kick. We are ready for it. Greg Zuerlein has that ability. You want to have a guy that can do all those things. You don't focus just on the field goal because guys will go in those ebbs and flows of the season, but I think that after Week 1, he has that ability, especially on those specialty kicks, that we have to watch out for."

On if the rule change for onside kicks is beneficial:

"I think it's depending on what side you're on. If you are on the hands team, we don't like it right. We want more guys in the box so that we can recover it. I tell the guys all the time, hopefully we are in more hands situations during the season than we are on onside. It is more advantageous for the onside team, but given that it's week to week, what the schemes do, I think there's only so many kicks that these kickers can do. I think the numbers say you can scheme it however you want, you can get what you want to get to blocking-wise, but the numbers will go up with how the league wants to because you want everybody in the stands as long as possible. It will make it more of an exciting play."

TIGHT END JARED COOK

On the if he thought that the offense's performance in the first half against Washington was 'rough':

"Not necessarily. The game goes how it goes, you just have to roll with it. [QB Justin Herbert] ended up finding me and we got things rolling. Our chemistry and our rapport is good. Just continuing to work. That was our first game playing together. No preseason, only practices. Feel good about it. Came out with a pretty good start out of that first game, so we'll just continue to build from there."

On being able to utilize the short passing game against Washington:

"The defense kind of play it back. We knew going into it that we get some quick things off. He hit me quick out of the gate, and then J.G. [WR Jalen Guyton] out of the game, as well. I think I got like eight [yards] on mine, then J.G. got a first down on his. Those quick plays keep defenses guessing on what you're going to do. Once they suck up, suck up, suck up, and then you hit them with some draws and some runs, then you hit them over the top for a big one. It's just of our arsenal, part of the things that you have to do in football."

On if the ball 'got on him a little fast' on his completion in the third quarter:

"A little bit. The DB was kind of in-between of us. Justin [Herbert] saw the safety, the deep safety, before I saw it, so me and him were talking on the sideline. We'll do something different next time. I thought that it was going to be more over the top, but he saw the safety. I saw what he saw after the play and after we saw it on the sideline. He was just trying to protect me from that safety."

On if he is anticipating a high-scoring game on Sunday:

"This is the NFL. You never know how a team is going to come out and play, you never know how a defense is going to play. We just have to go out there and play our best ball and prevented from scoring, and score as many as we can. We know that we have to score of at least over about 24 [points] to give ourselves a chance, so we just have to make sure that as an offense, we put it on our hands and do the best we can to keep up with that score."

On Offensive Coordinator Joe Lombardi's play-calling potentially reflecting the offensive system he played in with the Saints:

"Some of the stuff was similar. A lot of different plays, a lot of different movements. I think Joe does a good job of mixing things around and calling different things. He's a different play-caller than [Saints Head] Coach [Sean] Payton was. A lot of the things are different. A lot of the runs are different, as well — just different nuances of how coaches see things according to teams that we play and how they play us."

On lining up next to WRs Keenan Allen and Mike Williams:

"It was awesome. Two guys that play huge. That's what you need. Whenever you want to be part of a high-powered offense, you need guys that play bigger than what they are. Some of the catches that Mike was catching were unbelievable. Some of the quick throws that Keenan was able to get his eyes and his hands on were also unbelievable. Those guys create separation. Even when they don't create separation, the one that Mike caught to kind of seal the game, or help seal the game, no separation at all — that was just trust between him and Justin [Herbert]. That was an incredible catch. Those are the type of plays that you need to be successful in this league. Those are the type of plays that keep the chains moving and the ball rolling for you as a team and as an offense, overall."

On if he has ever been a part of an offense that can close out a game offensively like the Chargers did against Washington:

"When you have over four minutes left on the clock, you know that once you hit four minutes [remaining], you need at least two first downs, sometimes three, to keep them from getting the ball back. We knew that we were outside of five minutes so we knew that we needed to hold onto the ball. That's exactly what we did. Once it got down to two minutes, like 1:40, we ended up taking knees and ended up closing out the game. That's just the trust that you have in each other. Like I said before about Mike [Williams] making that play, it's just Keenan making those plays, too — his catch sealed the game. That was huge. That's just what you need."

On how Dallas' defense compares now to years past:

"I think that it's a little bit more unpredictable, just because it's the second game [of the season]. There's not a lot of film on the things that they do. You have some preseason stuff, but the starters aren't out there in the preseason, so it's a little bit more difficult to get a beat on the things that they do. They have some similar stuff. It's a lot more man [coverage] than previous [Cowboys Defensive Coordinator] Dan Quinn years. A lot of times, he would just play man on third downs, but where he came from in Seattle and Atlanta, you saw a lot more zone coverage, like a Cover 3, but now you see a lot more man on film. You just have to go out there and expect whatever. Since we don't have a lot of film on them, you have to be ready for whatever they throw at you."