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Chargers Media Availability

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HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On designing pass plays for QB Justin Herbert to operate outside the pocket when facing interior pressure:

“When you play like we do on defense, and the way that [Broncos Head Coach] Vic [Fangio] plays on defense, the edges are hard to get to because of how wide we play. Whatever personnel group it is — whether it’s base, nickel, penny, whatever — when you play with true edge overhang players, the edge is really hard to capture. That’s why we designed it that way, to eliminate some of those plays that other teams have to defend. We had a [quarterback] keeper in early in the game to an open side and [TE] Jared [Cook] kind of got bumped off of it. We had a couple in the plan. We definitely had plenty of play [-action] pass in the plan. [Fangio’s] system is kind of engineered to catch a lot the deep play [-action] pass stuff. We had a good chunk of it in the plan yesterday, just didn’t end up hitting anything super deep. We missed [WR] Mike [Williams] on a double move. We missed [WR] Keenan [Allen] on a sting stop where he got pressure. It would’ve been a pretty deep completion, 25-plus [yards]. We got held on one. They called defensive holding on the one that supposed to be up and over the top to Mike on the launcher. I think that we had enough of it in the gameplan yesterday, but I think that just from a pure move-the-pocket-keeper game, the way that they play structurally discourages that.”

On building consistency:

“In a game like that is that tight, you’re going to have stretches where you’re not lighting it up. I felt like, in the second half, we really got into our rhythm. That third quarter really had a lot of good stretches, and even in the fourth quarter. What you have to be able to do against that team is on early downs, keep it moving and really put a lot of pressure on them to defend a lot of your base plays designed to attack those first and second down coverages. I felt like on second down yesterday, we could have performed better. After watching the film, and then studying it a little more in-depth, I felt like second down was a down that we didn’t perform great at yesterday. In the run game, we felt like, going into the plan, that they were going to play a lot of nickel. We felt like running the football would be a good idea to really force them to play us straight up. We didn’t get the run game going yesterday. I felt like that was something that you need to do against them in order to be successful. Then, just a couple of protection issues at the wrong times. A receiver that’s held up a little bit where a route is coming open against man-to-man, because they’re playing a lot of man-to-man this year, a route is coming but I need to be able to wait on my back foot. That route is open, but now the pocket is tight and crowded. That’s a good team that we played yesterday. We had some good stretches. I wouldn’t characterize our performance as inconsistent. We’re playing some good defenses. I feel like what we need to do is if we’re playing in a tight game like that, where my mind is when you’re in a tight game, can you find your offense late in the game? That’s sometimes how the game is going to be if you’re playing against a quality defense. You find your offense, you find that rhythm as you go. I felt like that was happening, but then we didn’t score the ball well enough in the fourth quarter. Then, we had the two turnovers. We’re fighting and our guys are working hard. We had some lineup changes yesterday and our guys came in and competed. We’re going to have to continue to do that. You have to continue to keep it moving and put together quality plans. We’ll do a better job of coaching moving forward. In a game like that, we just have to have our best stuff at the end because the game was tight.”

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr. playing limited snaps on defense:

“A little bit with the ankle. He was in some packages that were specific to him, not where that ankle was going to be a factor. It was more kind of a pass rush, third-down oriented sort of role yesterday. He’s improving. We’re going to continue to develop him as we go.”

On CB Tevaughn Campbell staying on the perimeter and the potential of moving CB Chris Harris Jr. to the outside corner position:

“That’s the direction that we’re going right now, keeping Chris inside and Tevaughn outside. Tevaughn, like you said, has had some good moments and he’s had some tough moments, but I think the direction that we’re headed right now is to continue to keep him outside and keep Chris inside. We know that if something were to happen, Chris could bump outside. On that outside line, T.C., right now, that’s kind of where he belongs.”

On the fourth-and-three throw to Allen on an in-breaking route rather than RB Austin Ekeler in the flat:

“His progression is over there. It’s Keenan’s best route; he has some options on that. [Broncos CB Ronald] Darby made a good play on it. You tip your cap to Darby; he made a good play. We felt like we had the matchup, it just didn’t go down for us. You tip your cap to them. They executed well.”

On the blocking assignment on Ekeler’s run on third-and-two on the opening offensive possession:

“It’s an RPO. In that down-and-distance, felt like that would be a good idea. We felt like that if they were going to play us in nickel that we would be able to get a nickel run with a pass solution to the perimeter. If you watch it, they kind of jacked up the motion and kind of lucked into the play a little bit, in terms of their motion adjustment. We weren’t connected on the right side of our line on that zone play. We just needed to create more movement at the point of attack. We’ve designed that play versus nickel, the exact look that we got, and we just didn’t get enough on the right side. Their defensive end rushed Justin [Herbert], so it kind of took the keep element out of it. This is a give element. Their linebacker made a nice play.”

On Campbell’s assignment on Broncos QB Teddy Bridgewater’s rushing touchdown:

“On that play, the pattern match was correct. Those four guys over three [receivers], the routes were taken care of. The guy that was free to contain the quarterback was [LB] Kyzir White. Those three cover players have to stay connected to their coverage because they have a receiver that is in their coverage responsibility. The guy that was free was Kyzir. When we lose the edge like that, Kyzir has to be the guy that pulls the quarterback up. Otherwise, if Tevaughn [Campbell] vacates, then there’s nobody on that guy. Whoever the free coverage player is in the zone is the one that is responsible for pulling up the quarterback. Then, the other three guys that have coverage responsibilities, they have to stay connected. Certainly, that was a disappointing one because we were in an advantageous situation. Obviously, it didn’t turn out our way. That would have been big, holding them to a field goal there.”

On WR Jalen Guyton’s fourth-down conversion:

“It was a really smart play. Number one, it was an incredible play by Justin [Herbert]. That type of playmaking is what gives you a chance. It was just incredible play by him. But then, I thought it was a really smart play by J.G. getting vertical and not wasting time after the catch. It was fourth-and-four. He kind of caught it in a way where if he had gone the other way, or if he had tried to do too much, we may not get that first down. He really made a decisive cut and he was really strong with the ball. I was pumped up about both of those things for him. That was a really nice play.”

On the Broncos’ first punt being downed at the Chargers’ one-yard line and if that was the ‘right call’

“They felt like the gunner re-established. I think it was pretty clear from the replay, from what our people said, that he did, and from New York, as well. The big lesson there is more from our defense. What I said after the game is that we had that first third-and-seven early in the game where [Broncos WR Jerry] Jeudy makes a play and we miss a tackle, and then we end up getting off the field and forcing a punt, but that punt gets downed at the one [-yard line] because we didn’t get off of the field on that first third-and-seven. Now, the field position is flipped. You’re starting backed up and now the crowd’s into it, where if it was how it should have been and you start on the 35-yard line, the crowd is not reacting like that. Now, the crowd is in it because the ball is on the one-yard line. Now, it’s a different-looking movie. That’s why it is a team game. We started off with a run. Then, Justin [Herbert] hit [WR] Josh [Palmer]. Josh ran a really nice route on that second down. Then, on that third-and-two, they were in a nickel structure and we felt like, in that down-and-distance, that having the run RPO would be a good idea, give us a few options. We just didn’t execute it well enough. You

go three-and-out. Then, on that second series that we went three-and-out, we were close. If Justin throws is a hair higher, we get a big first down, and, now, we're moving. You're talking about on your first two possessions, you have two third down-and-two and -three, which you're thinking, 'Hey, that's a good situation to be in.' You're a fraction off. That's what it is. When you're talking about getting this offense off and moving, then going three-and-out, that's the margin. That's how it started off for us yesterday. Defensively, I think that we can do a much better job of setting them up so that they don't start like that, that they don't have to start like that. If we can force a field goal instead of a touchdown, that's going to be different for them, in terms of when they take the field. It's a team game. We need to coach and play better that way."

On if missing the field goal out of halftime was 'deflating' for the offense:

"I love the sequence at the end of the [first] half, in terms of the takeaway. As you guys know, there was that freak sequence where we go sack, fumble, sack, fumble. You really feel like you're playing quality defense. Then, there's that third-and-goal touchdown from the nine [-yard line]. That was a killer. But, we felt like we were playing alright. But, now the score is 14-to-nothing. To get that takeaway, for [S] Derwin [James Jr.] to make that takeaway for us, and then for us to execute that two-minute drive before the half, I really felt like a lot of good things happened on that drive and we were able to cap it with Austin [Ekeler] on a really nice play in the red area. That drive to start the second half — that middle eight [minutes], the game that we talk so much about — it was right there for us to really have a 14-point explosion and make this thing a tie ballgame. Like I said after the game, the penalties, we had nine of them. They were really tough ones. No. 1, we have to make that kick. Even with the circumstances, in altitude, we have to go make that kick. But, we have to just be able to stay on schedule offensively and stay out of this penalty game because we're a tough offense to deal with when we do that. Sometimes in a game, you're just not going to come out and just tear it up, but as the game goes, you get a feel for how they're playing you. Now, you're activating all sorts of calls. I felt like that's what we were doing. I felt like in that third quarter, we really settled into a nice rhythm, but then we didn't have any points to show for it. We didn't have a touchdown or a field goal on the drive that you're mentioning. Then, you come up empty in the red zone with the turnover. It didn't go our way yesterday, from an execution standpoint, offensively."

On his evaluation of Offensive Coordinator Joe Lombardi's play-calling yesterday:

"I really liked our plan going into this game. [G] Senio [Kelemete] coming in late for [G] Matt [Feiler], I felt like, from a protection plan standpoint, that's always at the beginning of all of our passing game thoughts, pass protection. We go into every single game thinking about our guys and thinking about the matchups. There's just a ton of time that we spend on it. Between the way we protected the passer and the way that we ran the football, it put a lot of pressure on how we were playing offense. When they were playing man-to-man and it was tightly contested, whether they were playing man-to-man or they were playing pattern match and it's tight, you're going to need an extra count in the pocket. There were some times where we were in rhythm and we were in timing, and there were others where we weren't. Justin, I felt like, was doing a good job of managing the pocket. When there's that consistent push, then you're not going to be sitting in there waiting for routes to get open, you have to get going. I just feel like we have to do a better job of staying ahead of the game. Like I said, some of those second downs yesterday was something that I was looking at a little bit, where I think that we can manage that better. Joe is doing a really good job of coordinating our offense; Keenan Allen, Mike Williams, Austin Ekeler, they're all having career seasons. We're ranked in the top-10 in every metric that you could ever hope for. Justin [Herbert] is having a fantastic season and growing in every way. I feel like we're doing a really good job of growing within our offensive personnel. I just have a lot of confidence in our whole offensive staff. We're going to continue to get better. That was a good defense that we played yesterday. You're going to have games like that where it's tight and you don't throw for 450 [yards], or where you have a 455 [yards] day like Philly where you don't punt, or a 520-yard day against Pittsburgh. It's not going to be like that all of the time. Sometimes, it's going to be a bloody 350, 375 [-yard] day where you score 17 or 20 and you do whatever it takes to win the game. That's where my focus is; when the game gets like that, that we win the game that way. I feel like that's where we can continue to improve as a team. When it's in a tight game like that, can you make enough winning plays, as a team, to finish the game, on both sides of the ball and in the kicking game. I think that is where our improvement can be, winning that type of game."

On the defense's performance yesterday in the run game:

"I have respect for both of those backs, number one. At times, we were really good. I think that we missed out on a couple of really big, critical tackle for loss opportunities that really would have put them behind even more than they already were. But, I felt like our guys competed well, at times. Our edges, sometimes in their gap scheme, they're really trying to get it to the perimeter. I felt like we could have leveraged the ball better a couple of times. We miss-fit a slant on the second play of the game that I wish we had over again because it's a good play call versus that. I think that we could have executed it hair better. But our guys are playing tough in there. Like I've been saying, we're getting more confident in how we're playing in that phase. I think that if we had finished a couple of more plays yesterday that were there for us, from a tackle for a loss standpoint, I think that that could have been an even better day. But, there were also some runs on there that we need to improve on. I think that those backs are good measuring sticks because they're both quality backs. I feel like we're improving every time out there. I'm excited to get [DL] Linval [Joseph] back this week because he'll make a big difference. I think that we continue to improve in that phase."

On when Joseph will be activated off of Reserve/COVID-19:

"I don't know the day. I'm hopeful. He's day-to-day, but I'm hoping that we get him back this week."

On if DL Jerry Tillery has 'met his expectations':

"I think that he has made big progress in the run game. I think that his game, since the bye, has really improved in the run game. I think that he's playing a lot more the way that we expect to play up front. I think that it was an adjustment for him, but he has done everything that we have asked him to do. I think that he's rushing the passer well. He has a couple of TFL opportunities yesterday where he was in the backfield, in a position to finish a play, which I know that he can make. Just continue to improve in pass rush and being a factor for us. That's a strength of his. I think that he's a developing player. I like working with him. I think that he has made those specific improvements in the run game. I think that's a positive sign. Just continue to work on the production at the end of the play, finishing plays, but we like coaching him."

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.'s injury status:

"Day-to-day. Like I said, we're going to try and be really smart with this because of the timeline, with those happening within that frame of time. We're going to make sure that we're careful with the guy. You know the way that we feel about him. We miss him. But, we're going to make sure that his long-term health is at the forefront of the decision-making process."

On 'relaxing the players when frustration builds on the rollercoaster ride of a season':

"Perspective is something that's a big part of your job. A big part of your job, as the head coach of a team, is making sure that your guys have proper perspective. Them seeing the rest of the league and where we stand right now in the league, and these are the teams that are ahead of us and these are the teams that are behind us, and where are those margins right now? You have 8-3, then 5-6, then this group of 11 teams in the AFC right now. This is where we are. Could it be better? Yeah, it could be. It could be worse. We're right where we are, which is 6-5. If we were in a one-game difference, would that mean that we just feel so much better, like our whole perspective is different? Or, if we were one game worse? What you have to do, you have to be able to balance that and make sure that your focus is never too narrow where you get off balance. You need to put your perspective on the reality of the film and let that be the guide for you and not let the emotion of that loss affect the truth of the improvement moving forward in what you need to do in order to learn the lessons from Denver that can apply to Cincinnati. We have to let the emotion go from Denver. We have to let that go. But, we need to make sure that the lessons that we learned from that game, that we apply them to the next game. That's what I mean by treating each week like it has a life of its own, not being too high or too low, just trying to be as steady as you can. We all love it so much. It means so much to us. Yeah, when you lose a tough one like yesterday, you're going to leave the stadium and you're going to get on the plane and it's going to eat at you and it's going to crush you, in a way. But, that's why competition is great. Then, as a competitor, you have to be able to separate that feeling from then the reality of today, which is that we have to move on. We have to move on and we have to move on together. Then, the accountability, that word, in terms of how we played yesterday, has nothing to do with blaming someone for what is going on, or being ultra-critical of someone's performance. It's just taking responsibility for what happened, taking ownership of what happened. Then, being able to move forward together, better than you left the stadium. That's what we try to do here; take full responsibility for what happened, but be a better team moving forward. That's not easy. It's not easy because it's the NFL and everybody wants to win. Everybody wants to play their best. Sometimes, when it

doesn't unfold for us exactly according to plan, there are some teams that aren't connected that are going to question and that are going to turn on each other, and that's not what we want to do here. We just want to be together and we want to know exactly what happened so that we can keep our head on straight, keep our composure and be better moving forward, because we're in a fight. It's been that type of season for us. It didn't matter if we started out 4-1 or not, we had to fight to be 4-1. That was a fight. You've heard me talk about illusions and stuff like that, it was a fight when we were 4-1, it's been a fight when we lost a couple — three out of four, or whatever it was. It's been a fight and it's still a fight. What we have to do, as a team, is we have to keep figuring it out together. If your head is not on straight, you won't figure it out. We're going to try and stay connected and move on to Cincinnati the best that we can."

On if the 'expectation' is that Feiler will return to the lineup this week:

"I hope so. It was a true game-time decision yesterday. We worked him our pregame. I think that he probably could have gone, but we weren't going to risk that yesterday. We wanted to make sure, long-term, that he is healthy. I think that it was a really smart decision by us. Hoping to get him back here this week, but we'll just see how it goes."

On Tillery's roughing the passer penalty:

"I did not agree with the call."

On if Tillery 'got pushed back' into the quarterback:

"Clearly."

On 'theories' as to why 'teams not expected to win are winning more than they have in the past':

"From my perspective, from a coaching perspective, matchups are really important to assess. Don't look at records, look at the matchup in all three phases of the game. You can have a really good record, but it could be a bad matchup for you or a tough matchup for you, depending on the circumstance. When you assess a game that maybe you would think this team had the advantage, when you look deeper into the matchup, I think that that's probably where the truth is. That's where I always look at it from. When I look around the league, sometimes you just match up a little bit better than someone else. I think that is why the NFL is such a unique league, because of that. Then, what you have to look at, too, if you take the matchup out of it, you have to look at turnover margin and quarterback play. I think that those two factors really matter a lot in terms of the overall success, or not, of your team."

On if he will show the team the current AFC standings:

"The first time, I think, that I did it was two weeks ago, because we were past halfway. When it gets past halfway, that becomes a little bit more relevant. Now, everyone is kind of aware of it, giving perspective about where we are and where we are headed. I think it's always good to be mindful of that so that you can have the type of preparation and performance that we expect and not get caught up in things that aren't important. Where we are right now, we have a lot in front of us. When I say a lot, we have Cincinnati in front of us. It's a big game because they are ahead of us in the AFC."

On if the Broncos' secondary is the best secondary that the Chargers have faced this season:

"Yes, it is."

On preparing to face the Bengals:

"We need to learn the lessons from Denver, and all of these weeks, and be ready to apply whoever we have available for this game and take this matchup and do everything we can to get our guys in the right positions, and have our guys that are in those positions be in the right frame of mind to go execute at a high level. When you are playing good on good, it's going to come down to high level of execution and who performs better. What we have to be able to do this week is really dive into this gameplan, practice well and prepare well, so that we feel like, going into that game, we have our best stuff ready. When that ball turns over, there's going to be a bunch of adjustments within the game that we have to make and that we have to be ready for. That is just the type of year that is has been for us. We are not the only ones. Hopefully, we are building this thing to be our best at the end. That is our plan. I feel like so much of that is your mindset and that trust and belief in one another. We are kind of at the beginning of that here, because this is our first year, but we are 11 games in and I think that we know that we have what it takes. We have a really great challenge this week to see where we are at."

DEFENSIVE LINEMAN JUSTIN JONES

On yesterday's game:

"We definitely played hard. We have a couple of things that we have to get fixed on defense, a couple of things that we have to get fixed on offense. We have to come together and play together, honestly. I'm definitely interested to see this matchup again when they come to L.A."

On looking forward to hosting the Broncos in Week 17:

"Once we get our adjustments and everything, I feel like we'll be OK."

On the defensive line being 'out of wits' yesterday:

"I wouldn't say that we were out of wits. I feel like the whole defense kind of had to settle down. We had a long trip over there. Going into that environment, the defense definitely had to settle in as a whole."

On if yesterday's loss 'left a bad taste in his mouth':

"It definitely did. That's part of the league. Everybody is good, everybody is preparing and everybody is getting better every week. We just have to keep doing our thing, keep getting better and keep striving to get those wins."

On preparing for the Bengals QB Joe Burrow:

"I definitely know that he seems a lot more comfortable in that offense. They're playing well, so we have to mix it up and be on our p's and q's when we go out there and play them. Once we get this gameplan squared away and everybody is comfortable with what we're doing, I think that we'll be OK. We just have to make sure that we're playing together, making sure that everybody is on the same page."

On defending the run yesterday:

"We weren't settled down in that first quarter. That first quarter, I feel like they had a lot of rushing yards. The defense, as a whole, had to settle in. The defense had to figure out what our identity was going to be for that game. We just had to get our groove and get into our rhythm. The next three quarters after that, the rushing yards really weren't affecting us. But, that first quarter really put us in a hole. It put our offense in a hole, as well."

On 'if traveling on Saturday doesn't give him enough time to settle in and plan for the game on Sunday':

"It depends on where you're going. Going somewhere like Denver, where the elevation does play a role in your performance, I do feel like that did take some getting used to in the first quarter. As the game went on, I feel like we got used to it, which also helped us play better. A lot of guys were getting accustomed to playing in that elevation. I do feel like it got better as the game went on."

On Bengals RB Joe Mixon:

"He's a really good back. It's a really good challenge for us up front and a really good challenge for us as a defense. We'll come and play together. We need to go out and establish our identity from the first play. I feel like it is going to be a battle. If we all play together and execute the gameplan the way that it's supposed to be executed, then we should be able to come out on top."