

Chargers Week 9 Media Availability

Thursday, November 2, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On an injury update regarding WR Joshua Palmer:

"Day-to-day. To be determined for this weekend."

On 'if there is a chance' that Palmer could play on Monday night:

"To be determined."

On the Jets' defense:

"They're playing really well as a unit. I think that it starts up front with their front seven. They have eight D-linemen that they roll through there, and then three linebackers who can really run. [Jets LB] C.J. Mosely there in the middle, I think that he is of that mold of a guy that has been doing it at such a high level for so long. He is kind of the anchor there in the middle. They have good team speed. In the secondary, they play well together. [Jets CB] Sauce Gardner, he has turned into one of the top corners in the league. They're a team that really plays hard, too. Their playstyle shows up on tape. A well-coached group."

On 'avoiding letting a defense get into their pass rush script':

"I think that you have to keep them off-balance. The big thing that you have to force defenses to do is to adjust, and force them to see things that they have to second guess. Keep them off balance. That doesn't just mean run the ball, you have to really force their defense to communicate and force them to adjust and keep them off-balance. If you give them a steady diet — when you just turn into a passing team and it's drop back, now they can get into rhythm with not only their front seven, but then their back seven, too, in terms of how they play. That's how I think you need to play against all good defenses, but particularly defenses that have dominant fronts or that capacity to really dominate. I think that that's going to be important in the game."

On Jets CB Sauce Gardner:

"He has a lot of confidence. He has a lot of tools to work with. He has real size and length. For someone that's tall, like Sauce [Gardner] is, he has really good change of direction and lower-body movement. He's not just a big guy that can run, he has real movement skills, which I think makes you more of a complete cover guy. He has good instincts, has good ball skills. That's how it was at Cincinnati. Like I said, he has established himself as one of the top corners in the game."

On 'why the numbers on the ground are lower':

"I think that we've been a little bit off. When you're inconsistent, it's not just one area. I think if it was one area, we could solve it. I think that it's each area just doing a little bit better. Sometimes, in some aspects of your team, there's just that period where you have to figure it out. The running game, on offense, for us is one of those areas where it's just taken us some time to figure it out. But, we have the right guys for the job. I know that we're working hard at it. I know that we have a capable group. This will be another good opportunity for us to come together."

On particular areas of focus or 'improvement':

"That's part of it, the aspects that you feel like you need to improve, for sure. That's been a focus for us. But again, it's collective. It's not abandoning the mission, it's just doing the things within your identity better, collectively. That's what we've been focusing on, just leaning into who we are and making sure that we're improving as a unit, and that will eventually lead to the production."

On the run game and how that compares to QB Justin Herbert's performance last week:

"Every game is different. Last game, the way that we threw the football was what we needed to do to win that game, with the way they were playing us. Chicago has a really good run defense, statistically. They engineer a lot of their defense to take away the run. I think it was one of those completion games for us. That's how we had to play the game. I think the mission was accomplished, in terms of how we wanted to play that game, getting Justin [Herbert] in rhythm. I thought that we protected the passer really well, so that's a sign that our front was playing well. But in the run game, there's room for improvement. I think everybody knows that. Sometimes there are just aspects of offense, defense and kicking game that just take more time than others. That's an aspect of ours that we need to keep working on."

On 'what led to' waiving TE Tre' McKitty:

"Just performance. Felt like we needed to upgrade the production at that position. That's the reason why."

On if the 'production' was related to tight end performance 'across the board':

"Just all aspects of the tight end position. Felt like we just needed an upgrade."

On TE Nick Vannett:

"He has experience in the league. He has the size. He has balance, body control. He's played in really good systems. I just feel like he is going to give us that experience and that consistency at the point of attack that we're looking for."

On WR Keenan Allen and 'how he has been able to sustain greatness' and accumulate nearly 10,000 receiving yards over his career:

"He's evolved. I think that he has stayed consistent in performance because of how committed he is to his craft. He really plays the receiver position as an art form. What makes Keenan special — age, as well, the older he gets. His physical gifts aren't what makes him special, it's how he plays receiver. That consistency that he's played with his whole career is because of that commitment to playing the receiver position at the highest level. I think he can do things that are tough for receivers. He can play outside, he can play inside, he can read coverages, he can get to places that others can't get to because of his feel. I think you see it with [Chiefs TE Travis] Kelce, the way that he plays and the consistency of his performance, of just being able to have that feel and that friendliness to the quarterback. Really, no matter what the coverage, I can get open. That's inside and outside. He's such a smart player, you can do so much with him. That's why you see the production. One of the top receivers in the game, I think he's a receiver that everybody's trying to model their game after. I know that in me being here three years, I think that I've had a deeper appreciation for him every year that I've been the coach. In training camp this year, I was like, 'Man, this guy's a monster, like, we can't cover him in training camp.' And that is in Year 11 for him. He just continues to do it at that premium level. He means a lot to our team, from a leadership standpoint. He's earning everything that's coming his way."

On Allen 'developing his feel for the game':

"He has some stuff that's intangible, that's hard to find. I think that if you could give that to everybody else, then you'd have more people that have numbers like he does. Some of it is from God and his family, but I think his commitment to the craft, that part's all Keenan because it's not like everything that he has is God-given, his been able to separate, his footwork, his setup. Those are all the skills that he's learned along the way. He's still doing it as well as anybody in the game."

On his conversations with Allen 'after being together for three years':

"They're grown conversations. They are that deepest level of football, in terms of attacking a coverage, attacking a certain defender, a certain type of defense. How you can predict the coverage that you're in based on your location, a couple of things that you can look at because he can see it like a coach. He's seen all the looks. The thing about Keenan [Allen] is he's been seeing the double coverage for the last eight years of his career. It's been some type of double to Keenan on third down, some type of — whether it's a man-to-man double, a zone-double, he has seen it all. He's one of those guys that can pick up on all those tactical clues. Football, there are 22 guys out there and there's 80,000 people at the stadium, and he can pick up on the little things that allow him to separate and be open for the quarterback. That's why you see the production year in and year out."

On 'if opposing defenses are playing the offense any different this season, potentially less two-high shell':

"I don't know, I think it may just be the identity of the defense's that were playing, like if they're a split-safety team or something like that. I don't think that anyone, especially when we open the season with [WR] Mike [Williams], Keenan [Allen] and Josh [Palmer], saying like, 'Hey, let's play a bunch of single safety and have that group one-on-one,' I don't think anyone is thinking that way against us. Sometimes, I think the way that defenses have changed in the league, with all the motion, I think you're seeing just a fair amount of shell defense, where people are trying to put roofs on the coverages, have overlap and being able to deal with all the motion. I think that's more coincidence than anything. I just think, league-wide, you're seeing more of that."

On if he 'picks Allen's brain' to gain insight as a defensive coach:

"Yes. We have to defend so many tough guys. You go through our schedule and you can see the premium receivers that we've had to defend, and it's every weekend. Every week in the league, it seems like you're facing someone like Keenan [Allen], like Mike [Williams]. With a player like Keenan, who is moved around the formation, you get a feel for, I think, how you need to coach your defenders, how he's trying to manipulate their leverage. If he knows that you're outside, this is how he's trying to get outside. When you're in a premium leverage, how he can still beat it. You're just trying to, I think, pick his brain, to talk to the defensive guys, like, 'This is how I would set you up based on where you are.' But, again, there are some of those second-level decisions that he makes that no one else can replicate, and the timing of it. I just think he has a lot of time on task of beating people. That's why you see him the way you do at this point in his career. I know that we're talking a ton about him, but he's worthy of it because to have that type of consistency in performance, it's rare."

On preparing to face teams with winning records three out of the next four games and 'if he likes that the Chargers have to go against some of the best teams in the NFL the rest of the season':

"I think we've had premium matchups to start the season. I look at our first seven games and I look back at a lot of premium matchups with teams that are going to be there at the end. That's how the NFL is. Every week, you have to be ready to play. You can't be looking too far in the future with your team. There are a lot that can change week-to-week in the NFL, based on the matchup. The NFL, to me, is about the matchup in front of you. It's not about the matchups down the road because a lot of things happen in the NFL down the road, so that matchup may change. The way it looks now, it may not be the same way later. We're focused on the New York Jets. This is a really good football team. They've beaten a lot of quality teams. They have a winning record. We have a lot of respect for them, coaching and playing. That's where our focus is right now."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On the New York defense:

"They're really well-coached. They have a lot of really good players on that side of the ball. They're a good team. We have to watch as much film as we can. They're going to do what they do. We have to be ready for whatever they bring pressure-wise, coverage-wise. They do a lot of great things on defense."

On making sure the game plan avoids a similar outcome as the Dallas game:

"I think that's probably a great question for [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore], [Quarterbacks Coach] Doug [Nussmeier] and [Offensive Line] Coach [Brendan] Nuge [Nugent]. They're the ones putting the plan together. I think it starts up front. It starts with us and being able to take what we can get downfield. Be aggressive with our shots and have a well-balanced attack."

On Jets CB Sauce Gardner:

"He's really good. He's long. He's able to cover downfield, intermediate and short routes. He's done a great job. He's had a lot of success over the past couple of years. We're not surprised. We know how talented he is. He's definitely one of those guys that you have to be aware of wherever he is on the field."

On his performance against Chicago:

"It's just execution, going out there and playing ball. Playing fast."

On if he was 'playing free' against Chicago:

"I appreciate those comments from [Head Coach Brandon Staley]. I think it's always good to just go out there and play ball. That's exactly what we did."

On if his finger is 'better':

"Yes, it is. It's getting better every day."

On how teams are playing against him:

"I think each team, they kind of do what they want to. I think we have to have a good plan going into each week, knowing that we're going to see something different. No two defenses are the same. We've seen a lot of different coverages, a lot of different pressures. I think that's part of the NFL, part of the league — getting a bunch of different things. Getting a bunch of pressures and seeing it all. Having the experience and being able to go through it helps a ton."

On if he's 'seen a trend' in the way teams are playing coverage against him this season:

"I haven't seen a trend. I'd be interested to look at the numbers, though. That does sound pretty interesting."

On executing throughout games:

"Just knowing that we have the plan, we have the right guys, and going out there and executing. Knowing that we're able to play really good football when we want to and when we're able to. Just being consistent for all four quarters. I think that's a huge part of us playing well and a big part of when we want to play well. I think it's just taking each play as they come, one at a time. Knowing that we have practice reps that we treat like game reps and knowing that it's not all going to happen at once, but it's going to be each individual play that you take care of. If you do that enough, you're going to play consistent football."

On WR Keenan Allen:

"He's a pro. He's done such a great job watching film, taking care of his body and being available. He's as good as it gets talent-wise, but he's a professional off the field, as well. The way he treats people, the way he leads our team. We're not surprised at all by all of the success that he's had."

On RB Austin Ekeler:

"He's a huge part of our offense. I think it opens up our offense, as well. Not only when it's on the ground, but it's in the air. You have to worry about him in multiple different ways. Whether he's in the backfield or whether he's lined up out in the slot. He's done such a great job of being able to pick that up and run with it. We know how talented he is. Any time you can get him out on the field and get him the ball, good things generally happen."

On balancing taking deep shots and getting the ball in Ekeler's hands in space:

"I think it's a great problem to have. To understand that you have those options downfield and, if everyone drops out and everything is covered downfield, you know that you've got Ek down below. You can drop the ball off to him and he's going to go get five or six yards, break a tackle and get more. I think having both of those aspects of our offense, I think it's only going to help us."

SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.

On the Jets offense:

"They have a lot of guys that can score the ball from anywhere on the field. Whether it's the running backs or [Jets WR] Garrett Wilson, we have to be into them."

On Jets QB Zach Wilson:

"I'm seeing someone who's having fun. He's poised. He's doing everything he needs to do to lead his team to a victory. He's making plays for them, so we just have to be ready to play."

On 'looking to' the next 'stretch' of games:

"I feel like you don't look at it as a stretch. You look at it as day-by-day. It started today in practice, and we got better from that. Last week, we got a W and started 1-0. This week, we're trying to do the same thing coming against the Jets on Monday night. We're taking it practice-by-practice, game-by-game and we'll look up at the end of this thing."

On going 'toe-to-toe' against other teams:

"We definitely know what we're here to do and we know what's in front of us. It starts in practice. In order to take care of what's in front of you, you have to be where your feet are in front of you."

On finalizing celebrations from the celebration committee:

"By the end of the walkthrough the day before the game, we'll have them finalized."

On the environment for the *Monday Night Football*:

"Anytime you're playing a football game, especially in an environment like that, it brings excitement. You know the fans are going to be loud. Home or away games, it's going to be loud. We're just coming out, competing and ready to go play."

On if this game is a 'measuring stick':

"I feel like each week in the NFL is a measuring stick, whether you're a coach, player or owner. Each week, you're going out to compete and show who you are. This week is another challenge, Monday night."

On the importance of winning on the road:

"Definitely important. We lost two games moving back, so we just have to keep moving forward. Stacking the days and stacking the games. It was a good week last week, so keep stacking from that."

On WR Keenan Allen:

"Longevity. That's my guy. He's a baller. He works hard. He practices harder than any guy that you know. For him to be able to do what he's been doing, nothing but love for him, nothing but respect. He's going to go down as one of the greats, get that gold jacket one day, for sure."

On if he got advice from Allen early in his career:

"He was definitely one of the guys starting early in my career that I saw a lot of success and I wanted to duplicate myself. With Pro Bowls and All-Pros, he was doing it all. He was a great guy to lean on, especially when I was going through adversity in my career. He helped me out along the way."

On Allen being 70 yards away from 10,000 career receiving yards:

"That's crazy. Like I said, get his [Hall of Fame] jacket ready."