



Las Vegas Raiders Transcript

Raiders Head Coach Antonio Pierce

Q: There's obviously a lot of speculation and talk out there, do you have any clarity on where this might go in terms of you coming back next year?

Coach Pierce: "No comment."

Q: You said you wanted to finish the season strong. How did today go toward those goals?

Coach Pierce: "Obviously the loss, that's not strong, right? You want to win three in a row, win at home in front of your crowd, win a division game. Started off well at the half and obviously turnovers were a momentum deal, and we didn't recover."

Q: I think this has been kind of the same theme where things were going good, rolling, and then turnovers just kind of threw it in a wrong direction. That has been clearly the theme of the season. I'm curious, as you head into the offseason, what are some ways you look at analyzing and trying to address that?

Coach Pierce: "It's simple. I mean, we talked about it. You look at the two wins. It's simple math. Take care of the football, be efficient on third down, in the red zone, run the football, time of possession. Today that didn't happen."

Q: With the rumors, trades and injuries this season, at any point during your tenure, did you feel like you were working with a full deck?

Coach Pierce: "I was working with 53 guys. That's all I can say. Whatever 53 guys I got, I work with them. It is what it is. Nobody feels sorry for the hand you're dealt."

Q: You got some pressure from the D-line at first. What did you see from the buy-in as far as those guys this year and all the injuries?

Coach Pierce: "Can't really say enough about that group, man. Just the way they battled throughout. I mean, a bunch of young guys from other teams. We had a meeting today where we had about 20 guys stand up that weren't with us at training camp, and a lot of those guys were in that D-line room. I thought Robbie [Rob Leonard] and Andre [Carter] have done a really good job of just bringing them along. Jonah [Laulu], Zach [Carter], have really stood out for us. Bringing in KC [K'Lavon Chaisson] was a big boost for us after losing Malcolm [Koonce] and then Maxx [Crosby] later on in the season. So, really good job for those guys. Obviously, it's going to be a big offseason for them as we get healthy and bring everybody back."

Q: When you look at your division, three teams are going to the playoffs. Obviously, you guys were competitive all year long. A lot of injuries. How far do you think you guys are away from being one of those teams now?

Coach Pierce: "Yeah, I think everybody sees a glaring need of what you need."



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Q: Obviously a lot of talk for Brock Bowers this year and deservedly so, but could you talk about Jakobi Meyers? He gets to his 1,000 yards and is a clear wide receiver one in this league.

Coach Pierce: "Yeah, how about it, right? Probably didn't start off as number one for us with who we had here. And then drafting Brock Bowers, then all of a sudden Jakobi [Meyers] gets put back in the spotlight. To me, it's just the ultimate compliment for this player because he's done all the dirty work, the crack blocks, the run blocking, reverses, throw the ball, whatever we asked him to do. Now he gets an opportunity to showcase himself as a premiere or a legitimate number one receiver and put himself kind of in that category. Now, what I love about it is he didn't really talk about that, right? He wanted to win. He understood. We all knew it was there, and obviously we threw the ball to him. He made plays. But if you talk about a pro that's been consistent from the day he walked into this building last year, it's been Jakobi Meyers. He's the ultimate team guy. He's the ultimate tough guy, he's an AP guy. He's a Raider. I'm glad he's on our team."

Q: You faced a lot of injuries and adversity this season. Obviously didn't finish with the results you probably wanted, but do you feel like you deserve another opportunity to be the head coach the of Raiders?

Coach Pierce: "No comment."

Quarterback Aidan O'Connell

Q: How important was it for you to be able to get back and finish these final three games of the season and leave the best of that stuff out there on the grass?

O'Connell: "Yeah, just been saying recently, definitely try not to take things for granted, and every rep counts, and try to be out there as much as possible for my teammates and coaches and just trying to be out there as much as possible. It was good to get back. It was an up-and-down year, a frustrating year in that sense, but fun to finish it off."

Q: How important was it for guys to help Jakobi Meyers get that 1,000-yard mark?

O'Connell: "Yeah, I think Kobs [Jakobi Meyers] deserves it, first of all. He is an awesome player, awesome guy. Works super hard and is really just consistent for us, and I think that getting to that milestone really just emphasizes that aspect of him and what he means to our team."

Q: How did you come out feeling after this game after getting banged up a little bit?

O'Connell: "Yeah, I'm all right. Just a little banged up."

Q: How do you feel about what you put on tape this season? Not just this game, but throughout the whole duration of your playing time. How do you assess it?

O'Connell: "Yeah, I think, definitely I would want some things back, some games back, some plays back, but also made some good plays. We'll take the offseason to reflect and really go through everything again and then start working on next year to try and get better and try to emphasize my strengths and chip away at the weaknesses. I think every year at the end of the year it's hard. It's kind of an abrupt ending. So, yeah, just going to take some time and then get back to work."



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Q: Obviously you guys were playing well before the half and getting aggressive there on the last drive. What happened with the interception?

O'Connell: "Yeah. Just a bad ball by me. Just threw it high to Alex [Mattison]. Yeah, just a tough play and put our defense in a bad spot, which you can't do."

Q: Jakobi Meyers mentioned that Antonio Pierce kept this team together through all the ups and downs throughout the course of the season. How did he do that?

O'Connell: "Yeah, I think it's hard. Again, he's the guy that has to get up there every day and talk to us and continue to try to motivate us. But I think he did a great job of that and really tried to speak to the guys that wanted to continue to fight. Obviously, we had a long skid there, we didn't win a game, but guys continued to show up to work and do the right things and just tried to chip away."

Q: How proud were you of your teammates that were able to stick together like that and not give up even though it was a bad skid?

O'Connell: "Yeah, I think it's awesome. What I'm definitely learning now, it's the end of my second year, there's no wasted years in the NFL, even if you don't win as many games as you hope to or play as well as you hope to. I think it's awesome just to build relationships, obviously with coaches and with my other teammates. So, yeah, I'll definitely remember this year as definitely a trying year, but I think those years you learn to appreciate down the road. So, I know I'll look back and appreciate this year."

Q: What is your main takeaway from the season? And how do you take whatever that is into next season and kind of look ahead?

O'Connell: "Yeah, I think it's just an up-and-down year for myself personally and a hard year for our team. So, like I said before, just trying to be grateful and not take things for granted, and when I'm on the field, understand how priceless those reps are and just try to take every rep like it's my last. Yeah, it was difficult to be in and out like that, but like we were talking about before, I'm just grateful for my teammates for having my back and us getting to win some games here down the stretch."

Q: Antonio Pierce also said you matured into a leader this year and you were more outspoken about what you wanted to stand up for with this team. How did you kind of see that progression for yourself throughout the year?

O'Connell: "Yeah, I think there's just a natural maturing that happens as you get older in the NFL. Like I said, I'm now done with my second year, and you just see things differently than you did when you first came in the league. Again, I think it speaks to my teammates and just trying to build the relationships with those guys. I think more than anything, I want them to respect me and respect the work, and I just try to put my best foot forward every day to do that."



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Chargers Head Coach Jim Harbaugh

Q: Getting to 11 wins and getting the fifth seed, what does it mean for your team?

Coach Harbaugh: "Yeah, that start of the new season. Really proud of the way the team played. Starting with the quarterback, I'm not going to say unbelievable, because I believe it and because I see it every day. There were throws that he was making that were, I mean, 15-yard throws, 30-yard throws, 45-yard throws, that were like handoffs. They were right where you would put it if you were handing the ball off on a running play. Just an incredible, incredible game by him. Incredible game, Quentin Johnston, 13 catches, 186 yards, contested catches, tough catches, SportsCenter highlight catches. He really had it all. Run after catch. I thought Ladd [McConkey] was amazing as well, near 100 yards and some great run after catch. It was so good. Really thought Joe Alt did a great job switching positions pregame and so did Trey Pipkins [III]. And hats off to Foster Sarell, too, who really did a great job. Daiyan Henley, that was huge, you talk about momentum, big play, been doing it all year, he's had an incredible season. And Derwin James, Khalil Mack and Bud Dupree, just great jobs by them, incredible games. Competitors, we've said it from the beginning, and they are incredible competitors. Loved the way the team played."

Q: With Quentin Johnston, what does it say about him that he was sort of able to come back from that drop that he had in the Ravens game and put together a performance like this in a big game?

Coach Harbaugh: "He's been playing at a high level all season. He's an incredible competitor, that's what it says about him. The talent, effort, his toughness, he brings a level of toughness to our team that is a very high level. And great performance. He's been doing quite a bit of that. He's a great player."

Q: You mentioned the Daiyan Henley interception. How much of a turning point was that in the game?

Coach Harbaugh: "That was huge. We were able to get the score before the half and then set us in position to get a touchdown and get that many points before the half, right after the half, that middle part of the ball game. But that was a huge momentum play. And a great play, just a great play. There's a lot of pass catchers playing at the professional level that may not have made that play, but he did. And he's had an all-star season. He's had a Pro Bowl season. He's going from shining star to superstar, I think he's reached it, and playing his best football. And I would say that for our team. The team is in a great place right now. Feel like we're in a great place starting this playoff season. And we'll turn our attention back to that."

Q: The defense obviously is the top-scoring defense in the NFL and played well all year. Have you been impressed by what Jesse Minter has done and the group as a whole?

Coach Harbaugh: "Yeah, I mean, probably everybody is. We held onto that, the top scoring defense? That's great. And I would say the same about Jesse [Minter] that I said about Justin [Herbert], it's unbelievable. It would be unbelievable to many, but I believe it because I know it and been around him. Seen what a tremendous coach he is and what a great job he's done. He's a superstar. Not a surprise, but it is unbelievable what he's been able to do."

Q: With Rashawn Slater, we were told he tweaked his knee during stretching and felt some discomfort. Keeping him out, was that an abundance of caution type thing or is there more to it for his knee?

Coach Harbaugh: "Just that during stretch he felt something and wasn't going to play. The trainers said, the doctor said we weren't going to play him, so that's all I know. That's as much as I know is what Josh [Rupprecht] told you."



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Q: So, something you'll be monitoring this week heading into Houston?

Coach Harbaugh: "Of course. I'll even go out on a limb and say we'll get an MRI as soon as we possibly can."

Q: What was the mindset in the last 18 hours, once the Steelers lose and you know you can get the five seed, what was just the vibe around the team this morning?

Coach Harbaugh: "This morning? I mean, our guys were dead set like we talked about at the beginning of the week that they want to win. They want to play good and they want to win. Today they played great and won. I don't think the vibe was any different. It's been a consistent vibe."

Q: What have you seen from the Texans?

Coach Harbaugh: "Really good. I've started to look and defensively really good against the run. Not a lot of people run the ball on them and they're playing really well in the back end. C.J. Stroud is elite. Nico Collins, elite. They've got great playmakers and great competitors. It's going to take our A game, so we'll turn all our focus and preparation toward the Texans. I know we are going to have to play good."

Q: Everything you guys accomplished this season, all the ups and downs you've been through, how do you think it's all prepared you guys to play postseason football?

Coach Harbaugh: "I think we're in a good place. The fellas are ready to roll."

Chargers Quarterback Justin Herbert

Q. That end-of-first-half sequence, how much did that flip the game and maybe take some pressure off you guys?

Herbert: "It's huge to be able to get a stop, a turnover like that on defense, and to get the ball back in that position. It's up to us to go execute and take advantage of that, and that's what we did. DJ [Clark Jr.] made a great play, and it changed the momentum of the game."

Q. What kind of special connection did you have with Quentin Johnston today?

Herbert: "Q [Quentin Johnson] was just – you've got to feed the hot hand. He's a guy that went out and made a bunch of plays. We've seen that all year. He's playing the right football at the right time. He's confident. He's going out there, he's having fun, and you can tell he's feeling it. And whenever he's doing that, you've got to give him the ball no matter how it is. And he did a great job of that today."

Q: Is that something that's happening where if they focus on Ladd McConkey, you've got Quentin Johnston; if they focus on Quentin, you've got Ladd and a bunch of different targets like DJ Clark, who caught a touchdown pass?

Herbert: "Ideally that's when we're at our best offensively. It's having all those guys and having Ladd [McConkey] on third down, having Q [Quentin Johnston] and Dis [Will Dissly] and even the run game we've had and putting all those pieces together. When we're able to do that, we are playing our best football. Whatever we have to do to get to that point, we did a good job of that today."



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Q: I was talking to Quentin Johnston about that Baltimore game and after that game when he addressed us, he talked about the balls he dropped and that he's got to be better. How did you see him go from that point and kind of the disappointment of that to the kind of performance he had today?

Herbert: "He's a true professional. A guy like that, it's the 'next play mentality.' Whatever happens, I know I'm going to go back to him and he's going to make the play on the next play. And he showed up today and made all those plays. Obviously, it's a tough game. Everyone's going to make mistakes. I've made plenty. But for Q to respond the way he has, to battle everything he's gone through, it's been awesome to see him just go out there and compete and play football."

Q: Just kind of everything that you guys have done this season and all the games you've won this year, the ups and downs you have been through, how do you think this has prepared you guys to play postseason football this year?

Herbert: "I think adversity is a great teacher. We've seen our fair share of it. And having gone through the tight games, the close ones, the tough losses, we're better because of it. We watched the film and we've done the things that we can to correct those mistakes. We're honest with ourselves when we watch the film the following day and we say, 'This is what we've got to do better, and this is what we've done well.' At the same time, as long as we're able to be honest with ourselves and to continue to progress and move on and develop, we're going in the right direction."

Q: You mentioned Quentin Johnston just being confident. When he's playing like that, how does that kind of bleed into the rest of the team?

Herbert: "Yeah, he gives everyone that confidence. Whether it's third down, first down, he's going to go make a play. To continue executing on those drives and converting on third downs only leaves our offense out there. We're able to get our defense some breaks and some time off. And when we're able to extend those drives, those 14-15-play drives, I think it's huge for our offense."

Q: Did you get a chance to watch the end of the Steelers game yesterday?

Herbert: "No, kind of followed along. I was meeting and watching film but I heard it in the other room, so I could tell good things were happening, I guess."

Q: What does it mean to you to have an opportunity with the ball in your hands as a team that gets to decide your own fate. You didn't have to wait for someone else to lose or something like that. Whatever was out there to take, you guys took it. What does it mean to be that team to finish something?

Herbert: "I think it's always important to focus on ourselves and understand it's always up to us. It's about those guys in that locker room, the coaching staff in that room. And as long as we're focused on what we're doing here and we're doing our best to be at our best on Sunday, that's all we can ask for. We can't worry about what's going on in other games because we can't control it. And as long as we're able to focus on that, I think that's what's important for our team right now."



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Q: As I mentioned to you when you walked in here, it was still fresh from last year what happened here. Last year was last year, but still to be able to come in here and do what you did today, I'm sure that took a lot of the sting off of last year?

Herbert: "Yeah, we've got a lot of respect for the Raiders. They're a good football team. They're much better than their record indicates. We knew coming into this one they were going to fight hard. I thought we did a good job offensively, defensively and on special teams, all three phases of playing complete football. And it's always good to talk about what happened last year and learn from it and move on and understand it's part of the game and you never want that to happen, but it's always about the next play."

Q. This is a very pleasant feeling to have right now, isn't it, to be able to go to the playoffs?

Herbert: "For sure. For all the adversity we've gone through and everything we've learned along the way, we're a better team because of it. And we're going to just keep getting better and doing everything we can to be the best out there."

Q: You've only played one playoff game in your career. You must be chomping at the bit to get back into it and face the Texans next week?

Herbert: "I think it's always an exciting opportunity to go play in the playoffs. That's all you want, you just want to take it to the dance. The guys have been excited about that. We knew we punched our card a couple weeks ago, but it's just a great opportunity. It's all the hard work that we've put in, through OTAs and through camp, and we're now at this position, so we've got to make the most of it and take advantage of it."