

Josh.Rupprecht@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jennifer.Rojas@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jamaal.LaFrance@chargers.nfl.com

Brock.Anderson@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Danny.Markino@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jordan.Colquitt@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Leonie.Strehl@chargers.nfl.com

Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Thursday, August 17, 2023 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the defense's performance today:

"Our guys were connected out there. I thought that we were physical. I thought that we played hard. The technique was good for the most part and the communications was good for the most part."

On the pass rush and 'the defensive front getting pressure':

"It seemed that way. We'll have to check the film. It was just good to go against a quality opponent. I have a lot of respect for the Saints, for [Saints QB] Derek [Carr] and that skill group of guys — [Saints WR] Michael Thomas, [Saints WR Chris] Olave, [Saints RB Alvin] Kamara, that group of guys. The line has been together a lot. It was a good test for us today and I thought that we got good work on both sides of the ball."

On DL Austin Johnson:

"Yeah, you saw him out there today. It's a big addition to the group. He has worked really hard to come back. It's been a fight. He's just wired the right way. Now, we just have to build back up and make sure that we take our time, but definitely a good sign for us that he is back."

On the status of WR Jalen Guyton and DL Otito Ogbornia:

"No updates on those two."

On S Alohi Gilman:

"He has a knee contusion."

On 'how concerning knee contusion is':

"It's not."

On the defense's performance against the run today;

"Like camp, it's been good, solid. The edges were good. The tackling was good. That back [Kamara] is going to be as good as a back that we will face this season. A lot of respect for him. They have [Saints RB] Jamaal Williams over there, so definitely a quality group to work against, for sure."

On what he has 'seen' from S Derwin James Jr.:

"Playmaking. Leadership. I think that he is playing with more technique than he ever has. He has really made it a focus to improve the aesthetics in terms of how it looks. We've asked him to do so much because he is capable of so much, but I think that he has really improved his fundamentals. He was a playmaker out there today, doing all of the playstyle and leadership stuff, like he always does."

On if James Jr.'s personality 'rubs off on guys':

"I just think that he's comfortable. He has been here now, everyone knows that he is one of the faces of this team. Being able to take on that leadership role, and then carry that leadership role with guys like [OLB] Khalil [Mack] and [DL] Sebastian [Joseph-Day] and [OLB] Joey [Bosa] and [LB] Eric [Kendricks] and K9 [LB Kenneth Murray Jr.]. They're able to really lead our team and our defense the right way. We just need Derwin to be Derwin. He's been steady for us since I've gotten here. His résumé speaks for itself. He can just continue to make improvements as a player. We're so lucky to have him."

On if the coaches 'try to lighten the load' of James Jr.:

"He is always going to be everywhere. He's going to be at a lot of different places because that's how you have to use him. You have to use him as a weapon. We've built around him since I first got here. I just think the pieces that we've added around him on all three levels have allowed him to just shine in those roles more. He's had a really good camp. I'm excited about his progress."

On 'how aware' he is of what is transpiring on the opposite field:

"I get the briefings. I try to do the 1-on-1s with the offense, and then I get briefed as we go. You definitely have a feeling of how it's going. [Saints Head Coach] Dennis Allen and their group was just really good to work with today. Their coaching staff, I just commend them. This is a great work day. I think both sides of the ball on both teams, and the kicking game, we got better today. That's the whole goal of these things."

On K Dustin Hopkins:

"It was good to get Dustin [Hopkins] back. There is still going to be time to let those two duke it out. Now that he's back into practice, that's going to be good for the evaluation, for sure."

On K Cameron Dicker:

"Cam [Dicker] has been consistent since he first got here on a Thursday last season [*laughter*]. He is kind of the same guys every day, still improving as a player because he's a young player. He's been very consistent for us."

On CB J.C. Jackson:

"I thought that he had a good day today. He's been more available, and so I think that he is increasing his stamina. I think that is going to be the thing that comes with it is just the stamina. Then, that ultimate confidence that comes with just practicing every day and getting the workload, but improving."

On the value of joint practices and working situations:

"Definitely. You can paint the whole field. You can get all of the time and score [situations] that you want, and at the right tempo and the right pace. When you work with a good team like New Orleans, you're going to feel really good about where you were after two days. The quality of the competition, certainly, is something different, schematically, where you have to face a little bit different looks and apply your rules. That's always a positive, too, because you're going to see who can really perform under that pressure."

On the 'personnel plan' for Sunday's game:

"I think it'll be similar. Based on these next two days, there could be some subtle changes, but pretty similar."

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.'s versatility at Star:

"He's improved in a big way in there. It started in the springtime, his development. D.A. [Defensive Coordinator Derrick Ansley], [Defensive Passing Game Coordinator/Secondary Coach] Tommy Donatell and [Assistant Secondary Coach] Will Harris have done a really good job with him. A lot of his best characteristics are suited to play in there because he's so instinctive. He has that trigger. He can key-diagnose, which is a big part of the job. Then, I think just getting comfortable in the run support and the blitzing roles. He has gotten a lot more comfortable in there. He's a versatile player. I think he's had an outstanding training camp. He's been one of our top playmakers. We're going to continue to rotate those guys in there."

On 'if the Star gets isolated in the run game less often than a player on the outside':

"It depends. I think corners and nickels in the NFL have to tackle, just by the nature of the league trending towards more cut-splits. When the formation gets close, now they're going to attack the run support, which corners and nickels are going to have to be a factor in the run support. There's nowhere to hide in the NFL, now. That's why you've heard me say that it takes all 11 to play good run defense. Asante, he has the trigger that you need in both places. His experience, really, I think, has shown up. Then, I just think that he has gotten to work at Star. He has repped there, and now he's more comfortable in there. Then, you're seeing the playmaking ability as a result."

On OLB Khalil Mack:

"Khalil [Mack] has been fantastic."

On Mack and OLB Joey Bosa:

"Khalil [Mack] is going to play well, no matter who's playing with him. But when you put [OLB] Joey Bosa on the other side, and Joey's rolling like he rolls, you're going to feel all the playmaking, and vice-versa. It's the same for Joey. When you have Khalil Mack on the other side, it's going to really help their overall performance. Khalil sets a high standard for that edge group, and you're seeing the impact that he and Joey have had, I think, as leaders. Joey has been exceptional leading this edge group. Those six guys behind them have had really quality camps because they're just soaking up all that knowledge from those two guys. Those two guys have been very consistent for us. They had a good day out there today."

On OLB Chris Rumph II 'now compared to this time last year':

"Just more aggressive. I think you guys can probably feel it on the sideline. He's on the attack. He's not waiting around. He does have playmaking ability. I think if you look at his sack production in college, if you're one of those people that believes that sack production in college will translate, he had the production in college. He just needed to fill his body out. He's a great guy. He has all of the intangibles. Now, I think that his body has caught up to his intangibles. He's just more aggressive. He has a motor and he's improving."

On what 'trigger' means:

"Trigger implies that you know what's coming, you have the anticipation. When you see these players trigger and they flash, it's because they have the anticipation, the reaction, where they're ahead of the play. That's one of Asante's [Samuel Jr.] top qualities. When we drafted him, it was obvious, at Florida State, that he has that trigger that most good defensive players have. You need someone in the slot that has that because in the slot, everything's happening faster. Out wide, you have more time. In the slot, everything's happening faster so you have to have someone who can think in there. Then, from a physical standpoint, you have to have the quickness to stay with quicker players. But the thing about Asante is that he is a strong guy. He's not some peanut in there, now [*laughter*]. He's 186-, 187-pound guy. He's packed up. He does have the strength to play in there. You guys have seen it all through training camp, he has been one of our top players in camp."

On DB Mark Webb Jr.:

"I think that we just kind of held him out as a precaution, just kind of felt something in 1-on-1s. We'll know more after practice."

WIDE RECEIVER KEENAN ALLEN

On his one-handed catch in practice:

"Hell of a ball. [QB Justin] Herbert put in on a spot, a one hand catch. It got the juices flowing a little bit. Seemed only right that you give it to a fan."

On 'if it is not fair':

"It's not fair, at all [*laughter*]."

On this season:

"I'm feeling really good. The offseason went well, training camp has been going well. We're able to go against somebody different today who obviously didn't game plan, might see a double-team tomorrow [*laughter*]."

On practicing against other teams for players not in the preseason games:

"I think so, it's another chance to get hurt. It's not what we need, we need all the guys that we can and going to the season healthy."

On joint practices being 'more beneficial than preseason games':

"In a preseason game, you're only going two series, maybe a quarter. Today. we played a damn near full game, so to speak. We had situational out of it, too. It's a little bit better."

On the offense's performance in the red zone today:

"Today, it was solid. Still an area that we need to work on. Obviously, we need to score in those situations and be able to get our guys the ball."

On the goals for this season:

"I think everyone knows that we're playing for the Super Bowl. That's the only reason we come back to start a new season, to try to go get the Super Bowl. That's definitely the first thing. Other than that, play physical, play together and control the field."

On if he 'talks' to WR Quentin Johnston 'about drops':

"Not that specific. Drops happen. That was his first NFL game — jitters and being uncomfortable, a lot of things go into that. You're still trying to find a rhythm, still trying to get comfortable. The play-calling, you're still trying to get used to. You have to be able to settle in, that's not going to happen in the first game. That's tough, he'll get better as it goes. That's part of being a professional, understanding how to get on with it and move on to the next play."

On TE Antonio Gates being inducted in the Chargers Hall of Fame:

"That was big time. I couldn't say more about the person he was in the locker room for us, and to me. Obviously. one of my mentors, my big bro. He taught me a lot of things on and off the field. We hung out a lot. In the locker room, we were always together, so being around him helped me grow, too."

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER KHALIL MACK

On joint practices:

"It was good. It was a good day. Overall, solid. We have to look at the film, get things corrected and come out ready tomorrow.

"Just going against somebody else, other than your teammate. Working on things, whether it's schematically or whether it's against different players — tight ends, tackle, quarterback — knowing that you're going to get different things. Just putting your best work against their best and going to work, it's always a good day."

On no fights breaking out on the first day of joint practices:

"Overall, it's understanding that there are two leaders on both sides of the ball, with [Head Coach Brandon] Staley and [Saints Head Coach] Dennis Allen, one of my old coaches. Understandably so, they're professional guys. The teams are going to act accordingly. Professional. It was a very professional setting today. We're just coming out here to get good work, man. All the other [stuff], it is what it is. If it happens, if it doesn't, it is what it is."

On the team camaraderie:

"You can tell there's a lot of familiar faces in the huddle. Even the guys that we've added in, they've come right in and fit in. That's kind of a difficult question because of course we're close, but when you're on the same defensive unit with a guy, that's your brother and understandably so. It is what it is. There's a different level to it now, just understanding the different type of communication that we have and knowing how to communicate with each other is effective as well."

On the importance of continuity to the defense:

"It's very important. It's always important. You say continuity, but I say communication. Knowing how to communicate on and off the field. Whether it's getting on a guy or whether it's during a play and trying to tell them what you want or tell them what you're trying to do — whether it's [DL Morgan] Fox, [DL] Nick Williams, [DL] Sebastian [Joseph-Day]. We kind of have a feel for each other. That's important, as well."

On the defensive pressure:

"Oh, you said the edge rushers didn't get in the backfield [*laughter*]? I don't know if you were really watching [*laughter*]. But nah, that's what we expect. We expect that day-in and day-out, whether it's our offense or any other offense. We want to affect the quarterback."

On QB Justin Herbert:

"He's coming around as a leader. He's a lot more vocal. We hear him in the locker room. You see him smiling a lot more. Why? I feel like you all probably can guess why. Overall, you can tell that he's maturing and growing. He loves football. We love him because he loves the game. We love to play with him."

On the quarterback as a leader:

"It's important. It's very important for the football team because that's the guy that has the ball in his hands more than anyone. You want to know that you can follow that guy, on and off the field."

On if he had any fun banter with Saints QB Derek Carr:

"Always. I feel like that's the most fun I have, when I'm on the field going back-and-forth with that guy. It's just like 2014 again, going into Oakland practicing against each other. It's always fun."

On if 2014 feels like a long time ago:

"It doesn't until you see gray hairs popping up on people's faces that you knew back then. Then, you realize you both have kids and wives. It's definitely a different feeling."

On 'how strange is it' seeing Carr not in a Raiders uniform:

"It's super strange. All in all, understanding the business of football, it is what it is. I know that he is going to be a hell of a player for them."

On 'what it is going to take to be more consistent on defense':

"We can talk about what it is going to be, and what's this and what's that, but until we get out there and show you guys, that's the only thing that I'm interested in. The talking part it not my favorite part. My favorite part is going out and going on the field and making sure that all of our guys are healthy and rounding up the troops and going to kick some ass."

On if he 'vocalizes goals for the season':

"It's important to have goals. But, it's important to keep those goals private, just understanding all of the outside factors. I'm sure that there are goals that me and Joey [Bosa] have that we're not going to share with you guys [*laughter*]. All in all, I feel like it's about what we do on the field and keeping it on the field."

On if the team 'vocalizes goals for the season':

"I feel like everyone's goals are the same this time of the year — winning the division and winning a championship, AFC Championship, and going to the Super Bowl. Everybody's goals are the same. I feel like the daily goals are the most important goals, coming out here and giving it your all, in-between the lines, and taking that to the game field. That is the most important thing."