

Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Friday, August 18, 2023 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On takeaways from yesterday's offensive performance:

"I thought our first group played consistently throughout the practice, outside of the red zone. In that second group, there were some good things. I thought that the 1-on-1s in both groups were really solid. I thought that we got the right work. This is going to be a really important game for that second group on Sunday night."

On the rushing offense:

"I think that we've, certainly, formulated the identity that we want to play with. There have been a lot of runs in camp, so I think that we've been able to evaluate our guys in pads. We still have two games to go, but it's really important to us to establish who we are both on the line of scrimmage and at running back. Again, we still have a lot of time until our first regular-season game."

On 'frustration with the referees':

"No comment. We're just having some fun out there [*laughter*]."

On the defense's performance over the last two days:

"I thought that it was a good two days. Our guys took the field the right way. As I said yesterday, I thought that we were physical. I thought that we were on people in coverage. I thought that our rush was alive both days. We'll have to watch the film to fully know, but it felt the way that it should on the field."

On QB Justin Herbert's performance yesterday:

"He was consistent, he was accurate. I thought he was really good in the pocket. I thought that he threw the ball with accuracy. A couple of deep ones, if we had connected, it probably turns it into a really big day. But, he was consistent. I thought he worked through his progressions well and got us into the right play call. Like I said, that first group was consistent yesterday."

On S JT Woods:

"He has had a solid two days out there, and that was part of the reason why these were two important days for him, to see him out there full-time and see the consistency in performance. We're, obviously, going to get a good look at him in this game, too. That's a good team to be going against, offensively. Number one, because of their quarterback. He is such an experienced player. Our disguise plan and making sure that that's a big part of who we are. Having to go against someone like [Saints QB] Derek [Carr], that's a really good thing for a young player. Then, the quality of the skill position players, it was really good. I think that he's improving, and, again, still a lot to prove."

On DB Mark Webb Jr.:

"Groin."

On 'how significant' Webb's injury is:

"We'll know more as the days go on."

On the importance of joint practices for the first group:

"This environment is my favorite part of training camp, especially when you play against someone like New Orleans. I said yesterday, [Saints Head Coach] Dennis [Allen] and his staff did a great job. They've been awesome to work with. The competition level on both days has been high in all three phases. I think both of us feel like we got better. Now, we get to play the game. It was a really good week for us, for sure."

On if any special teams players 'stood out':

"Our gunners, we have young gunners that are working really well. Yesterday and today we've been able to get a really good evaluation of that group. You can't have enough of them. It's like a sneaky part on your roster that you need to create depth for. That group of guys that are rotating in at gunner have done a nice job. We get the games to evaluate them, too. I think that group is improving."

On the 'back end of the receiver room':

"I think that it's the deepest receiver group that we've had in a training camp since I've been here. The quality with the second and third group has been the best since I've been here. It gives our quarterbacks a chance. It allows us, also, to keep that first group fresh — [WR] Keenan [Allen], [WR] Mike [Williams], [WR] Josh [Palmer], that group of guys. It allows them to stay fresh, too, because we have more quality legs. All of those guys have been making plays throughout camp."

On 'where' WR Quentin Johnston 'is at in his development':

"He's at the beginning of his development. So much to learn. He's going through that rookie phase now, where you've been on your legs and been going, been involved in the kicking game, and you've been doing more than you've ever done. He's the right guy to be coaching. He has made plays every single day that he has been out here. But, there's a lot to learn. He's the right guy to be coaching. He just needs to keep working and following [QB] Justin's [Herbert] lead."

On 'defining' Johnston's 'role more':

"He is going to have a role and he is going to be an important part of how we play, but how much he plays is going to be determined by how he performs. He has to continue to earn his way on the practice field. He has shown that he belongs out there and that he is going to be an impact player for us. As I mentioned, he has such a great room of guys to learn from, and that is what he has to continue to do — keep learning, keep trusting in Justin [Herbert] and earning his trust, which is so paramount. It was good for him to go against a different opponent the last two days. He is going to continue to improve because he is such a great guy."

On his connection with Saints TE Foster Moreau and each of their battles with cancer:

"It's a special connection, us sharing that cancer journey. It's a fraternity that is unlike any other. Playing against them the last couple of years, I've always respected his game. We had [former Chargers Run Game Coordinator/OL Coach and current Dolphins Offensive Coordinator] Frank Smith, who was with him at the Raiders, and kind of knew about how good of a guy he is and what a good player he is. But then, when you go through something like that, it's just going to connect you forever. To see that he's out here playing in the NFL, living his dream still, just all the respect for him. I just always want to be here as a resource, if he needs anything. Really proud of him and just so much respect from afar."

On if the 'plan for Sunday, as far as quarterbacks are concerned':

"Same plan. We're going to try to get [QB] Easton [Stick] a really good look. He needs all of the reps that he can get. He is playing at a high level and we are going to continue to feature him as much as we can."

On WR Milton Wright:

"He has come in and done a nice job. I think that he has made a good first impression on us. There's a lot to learn, but I think that he's flashed out there at times. He's a developmental guy, but we like coaching him, and he's done a good job of improving since he has been here."

On if both kickers will play on Sunday:

"I think that we're going to take a look at the last two days and see where we're at. from a health standpoint, certainly with [K] Dustin [Hopkins]. Then, make our determination from there."

On joint practices 'being clean' and 'without fights':

"I think it's the best quality of work since I've been here. It's a credit to both teams — the players, the coaches, the staffs. We have had some visitors over the last couple days who have said something similar. I just think it's two teams that have an identity, a culture, and that are used to doing things the right way. All the credit to the Saints and their staff, too, because it's been a lot of fun."

On 'rugged':

"Rugged is a term that was invented by [DL] Sebastian Joseph-Day, from the State University of New Jersey [Rutgers]. It's defined as classified [*laughter*]. We can tell you, but then we'd have to kill you [*laughter*]."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On joint practices:

"They've gone well. It's always great to compete against a great team like that. It was good for us to see."

On throwing the 'deep shots':

"I feel great throwing the deep ball. I love throwing the ball down the field."

On if he 'gets more out of joint practices than a preseason game':

"Yeah, I think they can be a little more realistic, at times. Defenses don't always play what they show in preseason games. To be able to go up against a really good defense, a really good team in the Saints, it's always a great opportunity for us to get better."

On WR Quentin Johnston:

"He's done a great job. He's picked up the offense great so far. He's going to be a star. He's made a ton of play so far."

On the development of the run game:

"I thought that we ran the ball pretty well today. It's a big part of our offense, being able to run the ball. I thought the offensive line did a great job today."

On the offensive line:

"They've done a great job. They're a great unit. They communicate very well with me, especially, in the protections, the run game. They know exactly what they're doing. They're very well-coached and they work really hard, so it's a great group of guys."

On if he has 'sensed the group being more excited about the downhill run scheme':

"I think they've done a great job of making it their own and playing together and communicating, getting it to the point that they want to be at. When you play like that, it makes the game a lot easier. For them to be able to make it their own, I think that they have really enjoyed it, so far."

On if he has 'made a conscious effort to be a more vocal leader':

"I think that's just the responsibility of the quarterback. Over the past couple of years, I've done my best to get better in every regard of our game, whether that's being a leader or whether that's speaking up or whether that's speaking up or just playing quarterback and being a good teammate. That's just part of the job."

On the challenge of 'becoming more vocal':

"It's just the job of the quarterback. The quarterback is out there and has to command the offense. [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore] has done a great job working with us and we feel like we have a great quarterback room. Being able to spend time with those guys, I've gotten a lot of help so far."

On his 'understanding of protections and making checks' compared to his rookie season:

"Each year, you get better. You see things and you go through experiences and you learn from them. Every year, I feel like we've gotten better. Especially with an offensive line like we have, we should dial those protections up. [Offensive Line] Coach [Brendan] Nugent has done a great job of communicating with the offensive line and the quarterbacks, and the running backs, especially. I feel like we've gotten a lot better."

On 'how much' he 'enjoys playing the chess match with the opposing middle linebacker':

"It's the strategy part of football that is awesome. You have to be sound, fundamentally, and protection-wise to be able to move the ball down the field. To have a center like we do in [C] Corey [Linsley], he has done such a great job of setting the example for all of the other offensive linemen. Having that communication with the running backs and with the tight ends, making sure that everyone is on the same page, that part is very helpful."

On TE Gerald Everett:

"Gerald [Everett] has done a great job. He is a competitor and he goes out there and makes plays. Whenever he is out on the field, you have to be able to find him and give him the ball because something special is going to happen. He has done a great job of being incorporated into this team and being a great teammate, so I'm looking for big things from him this year."

On Everett's route-running:

"He is a very good route-runner. He does a great job with the ball as soon as he gets it. It's my job, personally, to get him the ball, then something special will happen. I kind of mentioned how great of an athlete he is, so he is a tough guy to stop out there."

On the 'improvement from yesterday into today':

"Just competing, going out there against a new defense and some new experiences and going up against different coverages and protections. I thought that part was big for us today. Just competing, go out there and play our best. There are things that we need to fix and things that we thought went well today, but we'll watch the film and we'll address that later today."

On 'expectations were of the offense at the start of camp':

"I'm not quite sure what the expectations were at the start of camp, but I feel like we've made the offense our own. Kellen [Moore] has been very flexible. We've talked about what we like and what we don't like, and all of the things that we wish to incorporate from last year's offense and how we want to get the guys the ball. Everyone has been on the same page so far and I think that has been the most important part — getting the running backs in-tune with the protections, getting the receivers in-tune with what we want timing-wise with the routes. Everyone has been competing. I think we've gotten a lot better this year."

On 'personal expectations' and 'if he is where he thought that he would be three weeks in':

"I didn't really have many expectations going into it. I'm just trying to be the best quarterback that I can be, be the best teammate that I can be. Hopefully, we're going to be playing the best offense that we can be playing."

On the offense and performance in the red zone:

"We're always getting better, and that's the most important part. We're still installing things. It's camp, it's early. We're making plays on the outside. As long as we have those guys on the outside, we're going to keep trying to get them the ball."

SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.

On the defense's performance during joint practices:

"I feel like we got better as a whole. In the run game, we definitely got better. Communicating in the secondary, there is room for us to get better. But overall, we came out to do what we needed to do."

On CB Asante Samuel Jr. playing in the Star position:

"I've seen someone come in work hard and that is committed. He's growing every day and he's made plays there. At first, he wasn't very sure at it but now he's confident on it and he's gotten better. It's going to help us — the more guys we can move around in that position is going to help."

On where Samuel Jr. 'found confidence in the position':

"As a player, when you can make plays in your position or makes sacks, whatever it is, it brings the confidence that you need out here."

On CB J.C. Jackson's interception during practice:

"The more playmakers we can have out there that can get the ball, it gives us a chance to get the ball to [QB] Justin [Herbert]. Guys like myself, Asante [Samuel], J.C. [Jackson] and [CB] Michael [Davis], if guys can make plays on the ball, the more opportunities the offense is going to get."

On Jackson:

"The sky is the limit. He can completely take out a number one receiver. Him being able to do that allows us to do so much more."

On Jackson being in sync with the 'need' on defense and schemes:

"He wants it, you can see it all over his face. He wants to do it and he wants to show the people, not only in the organization but on the team — teammates in the locker room — what he can do for us and help us out."

On S JT Woods:

"The same thing with Asante [Samuel Jr.]. It's confidence, being out there in those positions — whether it's JT [Woods], [CB] Ja'Sir [Taylor], any of those guys. It's just the confidence in them to make plays, making big plays, in the deep part of the field. Once you do that, that's how you need in this league to be able to go out there and go play."

On S Alohi Gilman's injury 'creating opportunities for Woods in the secondary':

"Definitely, it created a bigger role for him to take on. I feel like he has embraced it and got better. The more guys that we can have out there making plays, the more depth that we have, you can never have too many DBs, I feel like. It's going to help us."

On what he 'enjoys most about joint practices':

"You get to hit somebody else, go against other people [laughter]. You get tired of hitting you guys, of course. It's always good because you see different looks. They're a way different team than we've already played. Their system, it's different than us. Just to see someone else is kind of cool."

On 'it all coming together' on defense:

"This is our third time doing it. We've added a few pieces along the way, but the more that you play together, the more games you play and gel together, the more you practice together, the more that you see what you did wrong, you get in there and you fix it. We've been out here working and feel like we've gotten nothing but better this training camp."

On 'continuity in this defense' and 'how important that is to being successful':

"It's very important. It's that bond that people don't understand that it takes to be able to communicate when you're tired, in the fourth quarter, that I can trust that guy next to me because we've been through it. I've been over to his house in the offseason for two, three years. When you develop that, that's what helps you go out there and play faster."

On Saints QB Derek Carr:

'He's leading that team. He's being a leader over there, for sure. I feel like he is getting his guys better. Like I said, it's always fun to go against him."

On the alignment today:

"I feel like everyone was where they needed to be. I feel like, overall, as a whole, we came out and did what we needed to do."