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Chargers Week 10 Media Availability

Friday, November 12, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On preparing for the Vikings:

“Minnesota’s defense has really stood the test of time in this league, since [Vikings Head Coach] Mike [Zimmer] has become the head coach of the Vikings, specifically. I think, when they got there, they were like 30th in the NFL in total defense, and then in one year, they were like 13th or 14th. Then, they were in the top five for pretty much the next five to seven years the next year. That defense really carried them to the [2017] NFC Championship Game. They’ve just been one of the elite units for a long time. That defense was built over time. I think that’s something that Mike Zimmer has a really huge talent for, which is putting a team together and organizing it. Him being with [Pro Football Hall of Fame Head Coach] Bill Parcells, I think that he is very specific in what he looks for, while at the same time, always playing to his players’ strengths. I was in the division with them with Chicago in 2017 and 2018 — that’s when they were really rolling. That group of guys that kind of came up together — [Vikings LB Anthony] Barr, [Vikings LB Eric] Kendricks, [Vikings DE] Everson [Griffen], [Vikings DE] Danielle Hunter, and they had [DL] Linval [Joseph], [Vikings S] Harrison Smith, [former Vikings S Andrew] Sendejo, [former Vikings CB] Trae Waynes, [former Vikings CB] Xavier Rhodes, [former Vikings CB] Captain Munnerlyn, [former Vikings CB] Terence Newman — that group was just fantastic. I think part of the reason as to why they are so fantastic is that they are very talented, but they’re extremely well-schooled, extremely well-schooled from a technique standpoint, from an assignment standpoint. These guys are really connected in how they disguise and play together. They’re really good on all three levels of their defense. They’re good in pass defense, run defense, pressure packages. Like I said the other day, Mike [Zimmer] is one of the best defensive coaches in the league, and he has been his entire career. Certainly, I’ve gotten to know him over the years just because we’ve played against him so many times. I think that all of us that coach defense in the league have looked at something that he does to try to incorporate it in our game because he’s that good of a coach.”

On LB Drue Tranquill:

“Yeah, Drue is in the COVID[-19] protocol. I do not think that he will play in the game this weekend.”

On when OLB Joey Bosa sustained an ankle injury:

“Thursday’s practice. He just tweaked an ankle. He was out there today and we expect him to play this weekend.”

On WR Keenan Allen:

“He got a little sore after he got out of the shower. It was one of those things where adrenaline was making him feel good after the game, but then, when reality set in, he was hurting a little bit. He was out at practice on Thursday in full pads and practiced well. He was out there again today. He’s sore, but he’ll play in the game.”

On what it means to have CB Asante Samuel Jr. back in the lineup:

“A lot. We’re really proud of him. We wanted to make sure that we take our time with situations like that. He bounced back well and got his rest. He really was ready to practice this week. We always want to make sure we’re careful in those situations, but he practiced well and he’s in a good headspace. We’re excited to see him compete on Sunday.”

On if LB Kenneth Murray Jr. will return to the active roster:

“Yes, he will. K9 will be active. We’re excited to get him back.”

On if CB Tevaughn Campbell will start at CB opposite of Samuel on Sunday:

“Yes. T.C. will start at corner, with Asante [Samuel Jr.] on the other side, and then [CB] Chris [Harris Jr.] will be on the inside.”

On WR Mike Williams:

“He’s bounced back really well since the Baltimore game. He’s practiced really well, which I’m really proud of. I think a big part of why Mike is having such a good season is how well he’s practicing. I really appreciate that, as a veteran guy, that is really just pouring into us and [QB] Justin [Herbert]. I think that he deserves so much credit for that. But I think it’s more target share. In that ball game against Philadelphia, we missed him in the red zone, which we should be able to get that. He kind of went a little too deep on the goal line fade. Then, the screen, just kind of missed him a little bit. Then, there were just a couple of times where the ball didn’t go his way when the design was for him. It’s target share. We want to make sure that Mike is involved in the game. I think that his presence does so much for our offense. You can’t minimize that. It’s just more target share. When you go into these plans, you’re trying to get all of these play-makers in rhythm the best that you can. Sometimes, it’s game-to-game. But, the thing that I think Justin is doing a really nice job of is not forcing the action. Why this group is a fun group to coach is because they really understand the importance of spreading the ball around. Some games are going to be different than others. Over the past couple of games, his receptions haven’t been what they were at the beginning, but I know, in terms of the game-planning process, that we’re always looking for him. We always have to try to do a great job of getting our guys the ball, getting them into a rhythm, because all offensive players perform better when they get the ball early and when they’re in rhythm.”

On why the Vikings’ rushing offense has ‘lower efficiency’ numbers:

“It could be the offensive line continuity a little bit, with [Vikings T Christian] Darrisaw just coming back into the mix, being out most of training camp. They were out [Vikings C] Garrett Bradbury. Any time that your O-line is in flux, and then [Vikings TE] Irv Smith [Jr.] goes down, those things matter. They make a big difference in terms of just playing together. I know that, for us, finding our way, you get a couple of injuries on the right side and it takes some time for those guys to play together and stuff like that. It’s a very prolific rushing attack. It always has been with [Vikings Offensive Coordinator] Klint Kubiak, [Vikings Senior Offensive Advisor] Rick Dennison and that style of offense, even with [former Vikings Offensive Coordinator and current Browns Head Coach] Kevin Stefanski was there working with those guys. Their rushing attack has been one of the tops in the league. I think what makes them so challenging to defend is that the scheme itself is so challenging, then you factor in the backs — [Vikings RBs] Dalvin [Cook] and [Alexander] Mattison really fit that style extremely well. What they’ve done a nice job is getting their tight ends to block. [Vikings TEs Luke] Stocker and [Tyler] Conklin are doing a really nice job of blocking for them with [Vikings FB] C.J. Ham, who is a really underrated fullback. The numbers, EPA-wise, may say something, but the film, in terms of our respect for the level of their run game, is really high.”

On Akron Interim Head Coach/Inside Linebackers Coach Oscar Rodriguez Jr.:

“Really, really proud of him. He’s a cancer patient, like myself, that went through a lot — a really kind of grave cancer diagnosis, and he was able to make it through. If you know Oscar, he’s a really positive guy, an emotional guy, a guy that has so much pride in his path, his story, being a Latino — there are not very many Latino coaches in American football. I know that he wears that badge proudly. I know that he feels like he’s representative of, hopefully, being an example for more people to be like him. Proud of his success. He is a good friend. I’m just really, really happy for him because he’s come up the right way. He has come up the hard way. He’s a really good example of where you can go in life if you really work at it and you treat people the right way.”

On the potential of elevating RB Darius Bradwell from the practice squad to potentially compete for the second running back spot:

"I think it's a good question. We're not disappointed with those two. The production hasn't been there, and those are the facts, for sure, but I think that we have yet to make that full determination of whether they can or can't. I think that that process is ongoing for us. In the kicking game, we're really excited about where [RB] Larry [Rountree III] is trending in the kicking game. He's doing a really nice job for us. We're just trying to be patient, and at the same time, create that high standard for performance. Then, try to get them into rhythm the best that we can and make sure that the opportunities they're getting are featuring their skillset the best we can. [Running Back Coach] Derrick Foster is doing a really good job coaching them. They're both new, young players. We're waiting for that second back to emerge, in terms of that guy behind of [RB] Austin [Ekeler]. We felt like [RB] Justin [Jackson] was really trending that way, and he had the setback with the injury. We're just going to let competition stay its course, and then we'll see, as the season goes, if a person will emerge as that second guy."

On preparing QB Justin Hebert for any potential defensive disguises he could see on Sunday:

"The production wasn't there in those two games, for sure. Both of those defenses, they're different, for sure, but I think what happened in that game was up front at the line of scrimmage, we weren't good enough. I don't think that gives you a long enough look to see what's happening in that second and third level. I think that had a lot to do with it. One of Justin's strengths is how he sees the field. I think that that's why you see the production the way it is because he can see the field. Not only does he instinctively see it, but then he has great command over how they play. I think, for us, what we have to make sure we do is get him into a rhythm early, get our O-line into a rhythm early. I think that's what was good about the Philly game was we got our O-line into a rhythm. You can do that a lot of different ways, for sure. A lot of unpacking disguise is not letting them play the game on their terms. That's when a lot of the disguise happens, it's in the passing game. It's not like on those early downs, it's really on those known passing downs. That's when a lot of the disguise expresses itself in the National Football League. I think that we just have to continue to be aggressive on early downs. Then, when it is known pass, continue to feature our protection plan in ways that help our guys. Then, from a route standpoint, allow him to truly progress. Something that's tough in the NFL is that you may not know the coverage. I think any elite quarterback would tell you that can happen; sometimes you may not know it. It happens. I don't care what anybody tells you. All of the great ones have been fooled. Giving the quarterback the ability to be like, 'OK, tell me where to start. If you can tell me where to start, I can swipe the board 1-2-3, and then I can play. I don't necessarily need to know what the coverage is, I can just play fast and instinctive.' That's what you have to do the best that you can. Then, the more inventory of experiences you have, then you're banking those. Then, now, you can kind of see the matrix, 'I've played against him before. I've played against that style. I can see the demeanor of that defender. This [Vikings S] Harrison Smith guy, I've watched this guy. I've watched him. I know that when he's there and what's over there, that's telling me a story.' But, you have to bank on those experiences. Game tape isn't enough. You have to go live it. I think that's where the great quarterbacks that I've been around, that are really hard to play against, they get better as they go because they've seen more. Then, that's why they're so tough to defend because they know you better than you know yourself most of the time. Justin will get there. As you guys have seen, it doesn't take him very long."

SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR DERIUS SWINTON II

On the Eagles game:

“I think it was a good game as far as the young guys really finding success in the things that we’ve been doing. I think it was a good step in the right direction. These guys have been working hard. I always say, look at our kickoff team and look at all of our core players — they’re young. When they see it the first time, it’s the first time they see it. I think, now, it has been a good job of transferring practice to the games. Now, to have success. You’re seeing the residual effects of it. To get a returner like [WR] Andre [Roberts] back there and have success on kickoff return and punt return, and the kickoff team really did a good job. The punt team did a great job last week. They did a great job on third down rallying [the offense]. I really like what we did there on punt. I’d love to have that plan every week. We rally up on third down and sit back down, rally up on third down and sit back down. That’s a great plan for the punt [unit]. I would love if [QB] Justin [Herbert] could comply with that every week. He’s our best asset. But, no, it was good. The young guys are really doing a good job. If you look at it, the guys are kind of ragging on — [LB] Nick Niemann’s eighth. I think he’s tied for eighth in the NFL on special teams tackles. For a rookie to be at that point of this year — I think they’re all hungry to get to that point. They know the job’s not done. It’s every week. I tell them, ‘It doesn’t matter what you did against Philly. Minnesota’s got a whole other set of guys you have to play against.’ But it’s good. It’s just good to have some success. The things that you’re preaching as a coach and you’re just like, ‘Alright, here we go.’ The young guys are learning, so it’s good.”

On if he’s ever had six rookies on punt return like against the Eagles:

“Oh, I don’t think [I’ve had] that many [before]. I mean, I looked at it. I joked with those guys last week after the New England game. I said, ‘Guys, [Patriots WR] Matthew Slater has more games and years than all of you guys put together.’ I mean, one guy has [the experience of] a whole kickoff team. I was like, ‘He’s forgotten more kicks than you guys will ever cover.’ I’ve never had that many rookies, but it’s a testament to them of just sticking with it and embracing their role. Some of them play defense as well. They’ve done a good job. They know and I’ve tried — [Head] Coach [Brandon Staley] has done a great job with the team. We’re young in general and it’s being positive. It’s going to turn the corner. You’re going to take your lumps when you’re that young. You just haven’t played a lot of snaps. The more you play, the more you see. Guys hit you with vet tricks and then, I tell them, ‘Put that in your back pocket.’ I go, ‘It happened to him one day. That’s why he’s doing it. Now, you can do that to somebody.’ You just have to have some grace with these guys as we go through the season. It’s a long season. You know, we’re getting towards the midway point and seeing if we can turn that corner.”

On WR Andre Roberts:

“I think [we’ve seen] everything that you’ve seen in his career. He’s a guy that just sees it. He sets up his blocks. He does a good job of just making everything flow together. He’s aggressive catching the ball. Even the one that you saw — he was really dying to catch that last punt return. It was just a bad punt. Everything was set up for him. I told him, ‘That’s what people have done in your career. When you get them for a return, now the guy hits a bad ball and that’s better than a good ball, sometimes because you don’t get a clean one.’ He always says there’s more out there. I mean, if you look at it on the second-to-last kickoff return — not the touchback, but the one we returned — he was one guy away. It’s the safety that made the tackle and the kicker was right there. I think having a guy back there and the communication that he has on the sideline is really big with those guys. He sees it just like a coach. He’ll come to me and say, ‘Hey, who was that?’ I’ll tell him and he’ll go to that guy and say, ‘Hey, man. I need you to do this.’ Just perfectly. He did a good job with [CB] Kiondre Thomas on the first punt return [saying], ‘Hey, man. You did a great job of not blocking that guy in the back. I made him miss and we got 10 yards.’ Just having a vet in the room that can really talk that with them and build their confidence in the game. It’s been really good having him. You can see why the guy has been a three-time Pro Bowler. That’s rare. It’s really good to have him.”

On the kicking operation:

"I think they flow well. I think anytime you have to work directly with a new person, there's a feeling-out period. Personality-wise, I think they really mesh well together. They're always together now and that's a good thing. I think their operation has been clean. You look at [the] Philly [game]. The grass and everything wasn't the greatest. So, they had to deal with some of those things. Do we move the ball a little bit here or there based on the spot? It's always good to hit a game-winner. I think that's a testament to the operation of it. They make this thing go. The specialist and the returners, they make it go and the core guys, they paint the picture. It's been really good. [K] Dustin [Hopkins] has been a pro. He's been a pro. Even on the first kickoff, he twists his ankle and never said a word to me. I didn't know until after the game. He twists his ankle on the kick and kept kicking. He was like, 'Nah, I'm good. I've played in Philly, I know what to expect.' That was a good thing. He's a pro. He's a pro's pro."

On the kicking operation being rushed on the mixed extra point:

"That is a good question because a lot of coaches don't go in the weeds with that, but the thing that I told [Hopkins], philosophically, is that on a PAT, I'd rather go back five yards than you feel rushed. He goes out there. He's an older guy, he takes a little bit longer. I told him, 'If you see that, just stop everything. We'll take the five yards. I'd rather you be in your rhythm than be out of rhythm.' So, he learned from it. I think he's been around places [that say], 'Get the kick off!' I say, 'Five yards? We'll be fine. Just make sure you get to the point where you want to.' That's a normal routine thing that he gets used to doing. It's just a rhythm. It's like baseball with pitcher when he's with a different catcher. Sometimes you have to shake them off. It's one of those things where we weren't in those situations. You have to be in those situations for them to talk about it. It's one of those things after the game, I said, 'Hey, what happened there?' He said, 'Yeah, I felt a little rushed. I looked at the clock...' I said, 'Hey, in that situation, look at me. Say, 'I'm good,' we'll take the delay. We'll go five yards back or whatever and we'll go from there.' It's just one of those learning things of how we operate and just making sure he's comfortable."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**On his progress:**

"That's something that we've talked about in the quarterback room. It is always about getting better and improving, but at the same time you need to look back and see how far you've come. In two short years, I feel like I've gotten much better as a quarterback, but there's still so much room to improve. That's one of those things that [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day and I talk about all the time. We actually get to talk about it quite a bit."

On the defense of Vikings Head Coach Mike Zimmer:

"He's got those guys dialed in. He coaches them incredibly well. When you have talented guys like that on that side of the ball, especially with a head coach like that — when all of that goes together, you have an incredible defense. They're about as tough as it gets. Just watching them on film, immediately, you see how talented they are. They're definitely a very tough defense."

On Minnesota's third down defense:

"Kind of like we just mentioned, they're an incredibly well-coached team. They have some really talented guys on that side of the ball and they make plays. They have a really good front seven. What they're able to do with disguises, they make everything look the same. Like you said, they've been historically good over the past decade or so. They've been able to pick that up. It's a very tough third down team. You have to do a good job of having a preparation and having a protection plan all week so that, when you go in there on Sunday, you have any chance to beat them."

On any lessons to take from the Baltimore game and apply to the Minnesota game:

"Yeah. I think, having gone through that Ravens game and seeing the looks that they gave, you have to learn from it. Obviously, it was a tough game for us, but we had a lot of good film to watch. You have to improve from that. Whatever the defense brings, you have to be ready for. You have to do a good job of preparing for it, seeing it and scouting it. Going through all of that process. I feel like as long as you have a good protection plan, you give yourself a shot. This Vikings defense, they're very tough so you need everything you've got for them."

On moving the pocket to find a rhythm:

"I think that's something that we try to do every game. It's just a switch-up from the normal dropback. I think we have guys on the outside that are able to make plays, especially when we get on the outside. I think it's just one of those little things for our offense that we're able to do."

On how his 'weightlifting' and training regimen is 'currently, versus the beginning of the offseason' and if he's added 'resistance bands now or tapered that down a little bit':

"It's pretty similar to the offseason. I think we kind of slow it down on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Most of the heavy lifting is done on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and then it's kind of downhill from there."

On if he is 'lifting weights':

"Correct. Does it not look like it?"

On the throws he is capable of:

"I think very highly of the guys we have on the outside. I think [WR] Mike Williams, [WR] Keenan [Allen], [WR] Jalen Guyton and all of those tight ends that we have, they're able to make plays on the outside. Whenever we can get the ball downfield to them, I think something good is going to happen. I'm not necessarily adamant about pushing those, but whenever I get the chance, I love to take those shots with those guys. I think that's a huge part of our offense, to get the ball downfield. I do think that's something that, moving forward, we need to take more advantage of."

On the offensive performance against Philadelphia:

"I think it was a big step up for us. I think that we could be better on fourth down. We had a couple of those situations that we need to execute better. I feel like we have the right guys out there. We have the right calls. We were just inches away from executing. That's one of those things that — I thought, overall, we did a lot of good things, but a lot of good things that we need to fix, too. We addressed those on Monday. I'm thankful we had another week of preparation and another week of practice to prepare for this week's game."

On finishing games with the offense on the field:

"I think that's a really good point, actually. If you take a look at last year, some of those games that we gave up early on in the year — late in the year, we kind of found a way to win those games. Ended with a four-game win-streak later in the year. As soon as you kind of learn to put away games like that, I think you feel more confident going into the next one. Having been through that with the Washington game and now the Eagles game, we've gone through it and we know what to do. We know how to execute. Whenever you go into the next one, you hopefully can look back and remember the experience that you gained from that game."

On audibling to a quarterback sneak:

"It's more so a tag onto a given play. I don't think I'm quite given the freedom to just decide to do it on any play. It's one of those things that, given the right look, the right opportunity, you're going to take it. Sometimes, you're able to save a play that you need to have later on in the game. I think the quarterback sneak is a very effective play in short-yardage situations. I feel very comfortable behind the guys that we have blocking. It's been pretty successful for us."

On Head Coach Brandon Staley:

"The best thing about him is that he's the same in every situation. He's confident. He's a relationship type of guy that cares so much about our football team. He's so smart. He was the exact same in fall camp as the spring ball. He's one of those leaders that everyone wants to work for. Everyone wants to fight for him and go to battle for him. He has the respect of this team and everyone really likes to play for him."

On a second-down run in the shotgun against the Eagles where 'the defensive end kind of crashed down on the play' and whether he could have 'kept it and potentially won the edge' and whether that would be 'in the play call' or if 'he could freestyled and potentially kept it on a zone-read':

"It wasn't quite a zone-read. I'll have to take a look at his comments, but that's one of those plays where you're trying to get the end trying to get blocked by the tight end coming across. That's something we'll have to look at."