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Chargers Media Availability

Tuesday, December 27, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On S Derwin James Jr.'s status within the concussion protocol:

"He is in the protocol right now. As I mentioned after the game, I thought that he was in good spirits, but he is in the protocol. We're going to be day-to-day with that."

On any additional injuries following last night's game:

"Coming out of the game, the only thing to report was that [FB] Zander Horvath had an ankle sprain."

On if he 'has an idea' of Horvath's practice availability this week upcoming:

"I do not yet."

On the structure of playing time over the final two regular-season games with a playoff berth secured:

"We're going to take that game-by-game here to finish out the regular season. Our plan is to continue to improve as a football team. I think that is the most important thing, that we continue to improve, and the only way you are going to do that is by competing. On a case-by-case basis, if there is someone that is not right, certainly, we don't want them out there if it is going to inhibit their ability to play in the postseason and play at a high level. We're just going to take that case-by-case. But, our goal is to play really well this week against the Rams and compete at a high level."

On the upcoming matchup against the Rams and his personal connection to the team:

"The thing that stands out to me is just respect — respect for everybody that is in that organization; coach, player, front office. I know the caliber of coaching that goes on at that place. I know the caliber of players that are over there, who we are going to have to compete against. I think that was on display the other day. They have had a really challenging season. I think that you can see the leadership of that team, both coach and player, in how they played against the Broncos. There are a lot of generational, Hall-of-Fame type of players on that field for them. There are a lot of people who have won a ton of football games, having been in the Super Bowl, playoff games. They demand our full attention."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.'s performance as of late:

"Kenneth [Murray Jr.] has continued to improve every time that he goes out there. I think he's a guy that is really benefiting from playing time. I think, as you guys all know, his second season, there was the injury factor where he wasn't out there consistently for us. We had a bunch of challenges where he was filling in some other spots. He just never got the continuity, I think, in his game last season, but he did a lot of good things. I think that the full offseason with us — and I know that he missed OTAs and then most of training camp — but just to be with us that entire offseason, and then to get out there and be the starting linebacker with [LB] Drue [Tranquill] the entire way, I just think that he has gotten more and more confident, more and more comfortable. I think the more that he sees the game, the more confidence he gets in his own game. I think that he's improving every time that he goes out there. You can see it. You guys all can see it. You can feel it. He still has a lot of improvements to make, but he's playing hard, he's playing fast, he's making plays. We're going to need to continue to see him make those improvements game-by-game. The thing about him is that he works really hard at his game. I can't say enough about what he puts into his game with [Linebackers Coach] Mike Wilhoite, [Defensive Quality Control] Isaac Shewmaker, his position coaches. He's always here, early and late, trying to get better. This means a lot to him. You're seeing that what he is putting into it, he is starting to get out of it, and that has been exciting to see."

On QB Justin Herbert leading the team to the postseason:

"We all compete really hard for Justin [Herbert]. His teammates, his coaches, we all compete hard for him. We know that it's special. We know that the quarterback, that position, and what really defines the quarterback position is winning in the postseason. His first two years here have been nothing short of amazing. I think that he has played well enough to be in the tournament. Certainly, last year, was an incredible year for us. We all know what he did to lead us to nine wins. We fell a little bit short last year, but his play was representative of a quarterback that can lead you to a world championship, and this year has been no exception. Quarterbacks are defined in the postseason, that's how the history of this game is written, is in the postseason. Now, he gets an opportunity to compete, like he always does. I know that he is going to treat that game, if and when it comes, just like he is going to treat this one versus the Rams, like it's the most important game that he has ever played. He just needs to continue to just be himself. Happy for him, and all of the guys, that we were able to make it."

On an update regarding OLB Joey Bosa:

"We're going to take that on a day-to-day basis. We will let you know when we open that window and when he is out there participating in practice."

On if he is 'worried' about the offense's production:

"I'm not worried. I have so much confidence in our players and our coaches. I think what we have yet to establish is that consistency of the rhythm of our offense and producing consistently, in terms of scoring the ball. I think that we've moved the ball all year long. If you look at our yardage and stuff like that, even when guys were out, we were still moving the ball at a high level, we just haven't scored the ball at a high level this year. That is something that is important to me, understanding what it takes to score the ball. I think that is rhythm, operation, attacking, and staying away from negative plays — whether that is a penalty, a sack, or any of those types of plays. Then, being able to create the explosions. Then, when you get down in there in the red area — you know, over 80 percent of the touchdowns in the NFL happen inside the red area — and when you get in the red area, you have to score the ball. We, obviously, had a couple of opportunities last night. We had four opportunities and we were two-for-four [in the red zone]. If you score touchdowns on those drives, that's eight more points, and when it's 28-3, you're feeling different about the movie. We just have to get into sync together because we're moving the football, and there are a lot of good plays in there, but it's just been up and down. It's going to take everybody. It's not just one person. I wish I could tell you that it's just this one aspect of the offense — this one person — but, it's not. It's just all of us playing together and creating that rhythm and timing that will lead to scoring the football because we have good enough players, we have good enough coaches, we just have to put it all together."

On OLB Kyle Van Noy and his leadership:

“It has meant everything to us. Definitely one of his best games last night. Just kind of a vintage Kyle Van Noy game. Doing a lot of jobs at a high level, running the show. He’s a guy that can really connect your defenses as an edge player, which is rare because he kind of thinks like a behind-the-ball linebacker. He thinks like a green dot. He thinks like a coach. You can kind of see that on the tape. There are a lot of things where he makes you smile as a coach because you know he is taking care of it. What I think has been awesome to see and where I think he has really improved this season is in his individual pass rush. He has always been a set-up guy and that’s one of his famous, sort of vintage, traits. I think his individual pass rush has really improved. He has worked hard at it. I think him and [OLB] Khalil [Mack] teaming up and with him being with [OLB Joey] Bosa and those guys, just sharing how to rush and stuff like that, I think he has been really rushing the quarterback hard. The other thing he does is he rushes smart. The worst place to be in the NFL rushing the passer is past the quarterback. You don’t see Kyle high and these fly-bys that allow these quarterbacks to take off. He knows how to rush within the context of the rush plan. He is just making a lot of plays in all ways, the energy that he plays with. He drew a hold last night. If you watch that play, that is a veteran play. He knows the play. He knows where it is going. Times it up perfectly and then he goes and splits it. Those are the plays that are hard to explain to people because they are not height, weight, speed plays. They are not like, ‘Oh, wow. He runs fast.’ Or, ‘He has this dominant body type,’ or whatever. That’s why I always talk to you guys about critical factors for the position. There is a lot that he has from an intangibles standpoint that you can’t minimize. He has joined up with these guys and he is definitely leading the way for us, for sure.”

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.:

“I think he is the guy that we drafted. You just love his make-up. You love his confidence. He plays with a chip on his shoulder. He is up for the challenge. Nothing is too big for him. He can overcome mistakes because he has confidence. He is not sensitive. One of his best traits is his key diagnose and his concept trigger and I thought, last night, you saw that on display when he was in zone. I also thought there were a couple of times in man-to-man where he covered at a high level. They tried him on the double move and in the end zone and he was able to put a roof on that and deny the ball. I think he is just playing more connected, playing tight coverage, and then you are seeing all of the energy that he has because he is a very confident player and how that is affecting his teammates. Just a guy that continues to improve. [Secondary Coach] Derrick Ansley and [Assistant Secondary Coach] Tommy Donatell are doing a heck of a job coaching him.”

On the ‘mental transition’ from playing in the regular season to playing in the playoffs:

“I think the playoff energy is just different because you know there are more eyes on the game and it’s the end. It’s kind of do-or-die. I think for you guys, it is more palpable. I think our goal as a team is to treat every week like a playoff game, like the Super Bowl in terms of the approach. You treat it like it has a life of its’ own. The type of attention to detail, the type of energy, the level of stamina that the NFL requires, that’s what we’re hoping to build here and I think that we are continuing to do a better job of that. We’re definitely not there yet. I think your mindset has got to be engineered that way because that’s what the great, I think, teams do is they have that discipline in their approach, the consistency in their approach. I think that is what the end of the season represents because I think that for every team it is a little bit different. There are still teams that are fighting to make the playoffs and then there are some teams who are in. What you are trying to do is play your best at the end. I think that is what in these last two games going into the playoffs is we want to create the type of confidence within our football team that we are playing our best or we feel like there is a vibe here where we can beat anybody because of how we are playing. I think that is something that is going to be a big mission for us over the next two weeks is to improve as a football team. This week, we’re going to have a great challenge because this team has lived it and it’s going to require our best and that’s where our focus is, on the Los Angeles Rams. We’re going to pour everything into this week that we can.”