

Chargers Media Availability

Monday, November 7, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On injury updates following yesterday's game:

"[T]rey Pipkins [III] had kind of an aggravation of that MCL injury. He's going to be day-to-day. [DL] Austin Johnson has an injury to his MCL and a fracture to his knee, and he will be out for the season."

On how much Johnson's injury will 'impact' the defensive line:

"It's an opportunity for these other guys to be able to contribute. We know the guys that are likely to take his place. It's going to be an opportunity for us to show that we can play team defense, and we're going to have to. I'm really disappointed because Austin [Johnson] has been fantastic since he's gotten here. I love coaching him, we love coaching him, but this is part of the NFL. We'll get him back here soon. He's going to stay with us and he is going to be a key contributor, helping these guys throughout the rest of the season."

On areas of improvement for the run defense:

"We just have to play consistently. The first run on that first drive, it's kind of been a story for us. That really impacts the total of your run defense. As you guys know, that's a very prolific running team. They had 35 runs yesterday, but outside of the 41-yard run, you wouldn't be happy, but you'd be satisfied with how you played, given who they are and how they've done. That one's the kind of run that you can't accept. You have to be able to play within the framework of the scheme. Those are the ones that we have to eliminate to become more consistent and we're working hard in order to do that."

On 'the plan' for 'who will step into the role' that Johnson had this season:

"We're going to work through that over the next 36 hours. Then, get out there on the practice field. You'll probably have a better idea of it then."

On RB Isaiah Spiller's performance yesterday:

"I thought that he looked calm. I thought he had a lot of productive runs. He was getting positive yards. I thought he hit of a couple creases. I know there was one run that he kind of lost his balance that he wished he had back, but he had a couple of opportunities in pass protection to really show who he is, which I really liked in the game. There was one in particular that I thought was a highlight for him. It was good to get them out there. I thought that he was seeing the game. We have to continue to get him more experience and more opportunities."

On yesterday's 'emotional win' being able to 'set the tone' for upcoming weeks:

"I think that the group that went to Atlanta was ready for that type of game. Any time that you can be in those close games against a team that is first place in their division, a team that has won a lot of quality games and beaten a lot of quality teams, I think that it gives you confidence that, 'Hey, we can go in here with this type of crew and be able to go close the game out.' I thought, in the fourth quarter, we had our best stuff. We fell behind early, but we were able to stay calm. I felt like our team really did not flinch after that start. Then, just really got back on track in that second quarter. We were able to really take advantage of the end of that second quarter and the beginning part of the third quarter, but I really felt like we finished the game, and that's always what you want, no matter who is playing, is that you finished the game well. I was really proud of that group because it took everybody yesterday, like I told you guys after the game. To get a road win like that against that type of team, I'm excited to carry that into this week."

On the defense's performance in the first quarter of yesterday's game:

"I was disappointed in that first drive because when you give up a run like that, it gets you out of rhythm. More than anything, it just gets you out of rhythm. After that, I think our group settled in. In the third quarter, they had minus-five yards of total offense, three consecutive three-and-outs. We did a nice job of limiting the explosions. In the run game, one of the good takeaways for us is that there were only two explosive runs in the game — there was the 41-yarder on the first drive and then kind of a 10-yard run. We were able to vice the football, for the most part, in the run game, and I think that's why we were able to win that game. Then, we put a roof on the passing game. There weren't any big passes in the game. There was like a 20-yarder off of a loose play scramble, but other than that, I think our guys really tightened up. We were really good in the red zone yesterday. We've been good in the red area all year, but the big red area takeaway by [OLB] Khalil [Mack] was certainly a huge play in the game. Then, I really felt like we played well in the two-minute, end-of-half and in that four-minute, end-of-game on defense. I felt like at the end of both halves, we were really connected and played good football. A lot of good takeaways from yesterday. Then, just again, increasing that consistency in the run game."

On 'how impressed' he was with WR Joshua Palmer's performance yesterday and over the last few weeks:

"He's getting better. He was a little bit banged up there for a stretch. I think he's healthy now — I think you see that for those of you guys who have been with us through training camp. He had an outstanding training camp. Over the last couple of weeks, I've felt like that player was back out on the practice field. I thought he was really playing with speed. I thought that that's what happened yesterday. I thought he was really aggressive in his routes, had really good setup, was strong with the ball. Outside of that one drop on third down, I thought that he was definitely one of the highlights of our team — he got a game ball — but he has to continue to progress. Any time that you have your top two receivers out, you have an opportunity to showcase yourself as a number-one receiver, as a number-one option. Yesterday, I thought that he had answered the call. He's been working hard with [QB] Justin [Herbert] in practice. Yesterday was a good game for him."

On Johnson's knee injury:

"It's an MCL sprain. Then, there's a left knee fracture."

On if the possibility of Pipkins III playing this week is 'still on the table':

"I think that is still on the table, yes."

On injury updates regarding WR Keenan Allen, K Dustin Hopkins, DL Jerry Tillery, OLB Chris Rumph II and WR Mike Williams:

"They're all day-to-day, week-to-week. Chris Rumph [II], Dustin [Hopkins] and Keenan [Allen], they're kind of in that day-to-day. We're going to wait and see. Mike [Williams] is more like week-to-week, but he's progressing. We'll wait and see. I think that you will have more information on Wednesday."

On if Tillery is 'week-to-week':

"I would say day-to-day."

On different personnel groupings involving S Derwin James Jr.:

“We just want to create these hybrid groupings that can manage what you’re having to defend in the run game and in the pass game. They play a lot of bigger groupings, but they can spread you out because they have a lot of hybrid players, like [Falcons TE] Kyle Pitts, like [Falcons RB] Cordarrelle Patterson. Those guys can play. They can make it look like different things. You have to answer that with that type of versatility and flexibility on defense. That’s what we were trying to do, is be flexible enough in the run and pass to be able to match up. I thought that those packages were extremely successful yesterday for us and allowed us to win that football game because you have to have those types of answers against a good scheme like theirs. As the game went on, I felt like we were able to activate the chapters of our scheme and really play quality football from the second quarter on, and even including third down, in making sure that they’re having to identify a lot of things. Then, getting Derwin [James Jr.], certainly, in places where he can attack and be aggressive.”

On James’ response to the usage:

“We wanted to play the game within the game where, the first series, it’s not out there where, ‘Hey they’re ready for it the rest of the game.’ You’re trying to play a chess game. Certainly, we want to do that in every game. It’s not just exclusive to that plan, but it’s throughout the season. We also want to go with what’s been effective in the game. We felt like a healthier dose of that was helping us, certainly, with how they were trying to play us. I felt like it was an effective adjustment for us. Give credit to him and our coaching staff and the players out there for really making it go.”

On performance of the cornerback duo of Asante Samuel Jr. and Michael Davis yesterday:

“I thought that they were very strong with their performance. Mike [Davis], specifically, tackled well. They held up in the red area. They were tried, in the red area, at different times. They were tried on their feature routes that had gotten them quite a bit of yards this year. Some of those, like what I would say, staple-like, explosion types of designs, we were able to take those away in the passing game. I felt that that was a big part of us winning that football game. As I mentioned going into the game, they didn’t throw it a lot, but when they did, they were very successful, and we were able to take that away. [Kyle] Pitts, [Drake] London, [Damieré] Byrd, those guys were able to get deep, too, so we were able to take that away. I felt like those guys both played well, and they can play better. We have to use their experience in our system. Those guys have played a lot of football for us. We have to keep getting better as we go, but those guys definitely played well yesterday for us.”

On ‘one play in the fourth quarter where Pitts got free down the middle and was overthrown’ and what the coverage responsibilities were on that play:

“Didn’t get overlap from the backside safety. That should be an interception.”

On RB Austin Ekeler’s impact on the offense and the team:

“He provides so much energy for our team and the playmaking. Once he’s gotten going for us, now, he has like 10 touchdowns or something like that? He has 10 touchdowns in not a short period of time, like a five-game span or something that. Scoring the ball for us, he’s just been such a big engine for us. Last year, he had 20 touchdowns. Number one, we’re moving the ball. He scores most of his touchdowns in the red area. I think he just gives you that that ability to score the ball both ways; running the ball, catching the ball. Then, we’ve been able to get him involved in the passing game and that really helps us. When you have your receivers down, you have to be able to find a way to move the football, and he does that for us in more ways than one. I think he’s doing a great job for us. He’s playing with toughness and setting the example. He’s produced for us really well the last several weeks.”

On Ekeler’s ability to collect yards after the catch:

“Timing and rhythm. I think the quarterback being able to play within the rhythm and timing of a play. If you have good accuracy, and he leads you in the right direction, it gives you time to go make moves, where if you’re inaccurate or you’re late, then you’re not going to have that same time to make someone miss. There’s been some good design by the play-calling by our offensive staff, play-calling by [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi]. I think Justin [Herbert] being able to hit him with good timing and accuracy have all contributed to him having a quality year catching the football.”

On what has 'impressed him most' regarding OLB Khalil Mack:

"Just the consistency in performance, the consistency that he has every single day, the competitor, the leader, the production in the run game and pass game, just playing the way that you need to play. I think that's something that he does such a good job of. He's a complete player and he's a very selfless player. If he has to go defend 35 runs in a game and he doesn't get very many opportunities to rush, then you can see that, yesterday, he didn't get a sack, but yesterday he won us the game with an incredible strip where he's dropping in coverage for us. He can set that example of, 'Hey, yeah, I'm going to take this coverage drop because it's going to help with coverage system so that we're not one-on-one. I'm going to provide body presence. Then, when they complete it short, I'm going to go run to the football, and then I'm going to go do what I do, which is take it away.' He just shows you what a team player should look like from a premier player, the premier players that can play as a team player. He's having a quality season. The best is to come. We have to keep him going. If we keep doing a better job in the run game, we'll give him more opportunities to rush. He was close a couple of times yesterday. Obviously, if he doesn't make that play, that game is a whole different movie."

On the level of frustration with dropped passes:

"The drops are something that no one wants to happen. I think the good thing about our team is the way that it's set up. If you take a look at the body language after one of those things happens, it's just like, 'Hey, keep it moving.' We know that there's trust in those players to make those catches. We've seen them make the big catches, but it's also the trust that that's part of the game. No one is out there trying to make a mistake. It's not like those guys don't have good hands. It's not like those guys aren't concentrating. Sometimes, it's just part of it. It's just how you respond to it. I think Justin [Herbert] does a good job of that as the trigger-man, never being affected, not riding that wave. You don't see that, riding that wave. It's just like, 'Hey, we're going to keep it moving, guys, and we're going to get it to the next one.' Josh [Palmer] had a drop that led to a pick, but then he had six big catches that were contested and that were like, 'Holy smokes,' and [TE] Gerald [Everett] was the same way. We went back to him on a big stick [route] on the winning drive and it gets contested and Justin [Herbert] trusts him in tight coverage to get it there. Same thing with Austin [Ekeler], like, yeah, he dropped a screen or whatever, but I'm going to hit him on a big-time choice route that is helping get us back on schedule on that game-winning drive. Our guys are going to continue to play together. That's part of the game. The more that we play together, the better off it's going to be."

On Herbert's running ability and the importance of that ability with injuries to wide receivers:

"You change the math when you can move your legs. Now, it's 11-on-11. The way the game has changed, back 10, 15 years ago, it's 10-on-11 the whole game. Now, with the mobility of all of these elite players, you truly can even out the game, from a math standpoint. It's 11-on-11 and they have to account for the mobility of the quarterback. It helps you on third down in known-pass where it's tight, maybe the rush is good and you can buy some time because the protection breaks down or whatever, or maybe the coverage is tight or maybe the disguise and the rotation of the defense buys a count, so you have to buy some time to see the coverage express itself. On that third-and-11 to Josh [Palmer], like 'Hey, I can move and then I can see and I can find the void.' Or, you have the design or the RPO, the keeper game, which gets him changing the launch point of the protection, where they can't just say, 'Hey, he's going to be here and we can design all of this stuff.' It evens everything out. I thought he did a good job yesterday with his legs, whether it was called for or not, and that helped us move the football. Like I said, I thought he played really well yesterday."

On if he 'pauses' when he sees Herbert 'go down hard':

"No, I don't worry about Justin [Herbert] like that. Sometimes, as a player, you can get caught in between of whether I should go head first out of bounds or if I want to slide. He does a very good job protecting himself. I think, you guys that have covered him, know that he's not one of these guys that puts himself into harm's way very often because he's a very smart player, very calculated. That's one of those ones where he was kind of in between, and that can happen. The more you experience, I think the better you get in that moment of indecision or of, 'What should I do?' That will be a good one for him to learn from. He's a strong guy. That's why he works out like he does. I know that he can take it."

On 'getting off to faster starts':

"It's different. I can assure you that we're not trying to do that. I know that one of the things that I emphasized, in the middle of the season when we were coming out of the half, where we hadn't played very well in the third quarter, it's just that reset at halftime in practice and coming out of the half and going over the openers in the second half and being confident in what is going to be called and practicing that rhythm of getting with your unit, getting with your coaches, coming out of the half. We made that an emphasis. At the beginning of practices, it's been similar, in terms of the openers and, 'Hey, you know what we're calling and you know what we're going after,' and stuff like that. I think there have been a couple of things in each game that have forced us to kind of be in that position, and it hasn't been like a common thread, but I just think, overall, it's just really owning your execution. That's most of it because our guys have come out and they are playing hard enough, playing with good technique. It's just really owning that execution. Certainly, you are trying to find the right play calls to get them in rhythm. I think that changes game-to-game. I'm trying to say all of this, we're not trying to get behind, I can promise you that. I know that this record of us getting behind by double digits, and us being like 3-1 when you should be like 0-4. Trust me, we're not trying to live in that world. We talked about it this morning, for sure, not being comfortable down 10-0, 14-0. I know that we're kind of making it seem that way, but we know that you can't live like that. I know that, we know that, and we're going to continue to try and get our guys in rhythm faster and play the right way from the get-go."

On his takeaways from the first offensive touchdown drive of the game:

"I thought that we, in those behind the sticks-type of down-and-distances, I felt like we had really good execution on that next play. If I would say, like a common thread like when we have gotten behind, I thought the Seattle game, maybe a reason why we lost that game is the reason why we got behind is because we turned the ball over. In the other games where we got behind, that was not the case. We didn't turn the ball over. I think there is a difference in the game when you get behind, like why you got behind, and your ability to come back from it long-term. I think that when we take care of the football or get the football, that's going to be a big factor in winning and losing. When you get behind the sticks offensively, to me, it's what you do on that first down or after that penalty, what's that next play look like? What we have done a good job of is just being able to flush it, get to the right play call and attack the defense. Attack the defense in that next down-and-distance. I think that you saw that yesterday. When we got behind the sticks, we were able to attack that next play and get half of it back or get more than half of it back and get into attack mode. I thought that's when we were playing well yesterday, offensively."

On WR DeAndre Carter's performance in the return phase:

"I think what we were trying to get is a first down every time we touch it. That's one of our goals. I think he was at 9.7 yards per return yesterday on his three returns. That's what he's been effective at, is being real decisive. Number one, we've done a great job outside; [DB] Ja'Sir [Taylor], [DB] Deane [Leonard], [S] JT Woods was out there yesterday. We have done a nice job in the vice or the single [gunner]. It's given him air to go be decisive. I think that's one of his good traits is he is not an East-West return guy. He is a decisive returner. The impact of 10 yards is big. Those hidden yards in a game add up. If you take a look at what we did on the other side of it, that guy was leading the NFL in punt return yards, and he had zero return yards yesterday. They had zero kickoff return yards. You factor in the hidden yardage in the game. I think that has quietly been a really good story for us this year is how our special teams have played. [P] JK [Scott], certainly, in terms of the hang time and our gunner play and our protection, it's been kind of those inches adding up in a game like yesterday. Dre [Carter] has been consistent all year long for us in that phase."

CORNERBACK MICHAEL DAVIS

On S Derwin James Jr. and DL Sebastian Joseph-Day wearing polos on 'Business Fridays':

"I think that's just them. It's a workday for them. It's a workday for all of us. They love the polo and I rock with it, but probably not going to be for me though, Polo Fridays."

On team bonding activities:

"We actually have dinners every Friday. [OLB] Khalil Mack usually hosts a dinner. Like this past Friday, we went to Javier's as a defense. So, that was pretty good. Just us being together and hanging out outside of football to allow each of us to know like what each person likes and what a person doesn't like outside of football. It's a brotherhood."

On his mentality when he played in a reserve role:

"I think what helped me stay positive was I talked to my mom a lot. My mom used to always tell me, 'Keep grinding. One day you will get your shot.' I guess that one day I did get my shot and I was able to stay ready. It was obviously unfortunate that [CB] J.C. [Jackson] got hurt, but I was just glad that I was able to go out there and just fill the spot with the position and do what I could do best."

On if he felt 'at home' playing at cornerback:

"Yeah, I guess you could say that. I just felt like, even at practice, me and J.C. [Jackson] were always pushing each other at practice. We were helping each other out. He was giving me tips on how to play things better and I was helping him out with the defense because obviously this is his first year in the defense. I think that's what helped me actually to come in the game and just play as if I never really left the position."

On CB Bryce Callahan:

"Obviously, he's been in the same defense with [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley for the past four or five years — actually, his whole career. I think he just brings a little bit more swagger. Last year, we had [former CB] Chris Harris [Jr.] and I remember Chris was a little bit older. I just think with B.C., he just seems like a young man, a younger man. I feel like he just rides with us, kind of fits in with us."

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.'s growth this year:

"[He's grown] tremendously. He's a Florida boy. All Florida boys have swag. It's just a given. Just a God-given thing. Every year, he's getting better and better. He's becoming more of an elite NFL corner, as he should be."

On the defensive adjustments after the first quarter of the Week 9 game at Atlanta:

"I think we just came together and just told each other, 'One play at a time.' I know the first series looked pretty bad on us, but I think, overall, when we came back in the second quarter, we just had that 'next play' mentality, just a 'one play at a time' mentality. Just staying together because usually when defenses start going different directions is when we start giving up more explosions. More explosive runs, more explosive passes, and stuff like that. As long as we're connected and playing one play at a time, we can accomplish anything."

On the defense's performance recently:

"I think, with the injuries that we have — I think it's a defense we have the mentality that it is up to us to dictate what the game should be and that we are at the forefront of the game. That we should be able to do whatever we can in order for us to get the win."

WIDE RECEIVER JOSHUA PALMER

On his catch in the final drive to help set up the game-winning field goal:

“It was man-to-man. It was Cover-1 and Keenan did a great job trying to teach me — and the coaches just teaching me — how the leverage is going to be played. I knew, obviously, he was pressing me. Once I saw that backside corner following the shallow cross, I knew it was going to be money as soon as I beat him off the line.”

On his relationship WR Keenan Allen:

“I’m lean on Keenan a lot. He and [WR] Mike [Williams] are like my big brothers on the team. I hang out with them a lot outside of football. They teach me a lot and Keenan had a conversation with me before the game, just basically to believe in my abilities.”

On what Allen taught him that helped him know the final play:

“It was just man-to-man. I knew once I beat him off the line, my route was going to — he wasn’t going to be able to cover me once I beat him off the line, just given the coverage. I knew that what [QB] Justin [Hebert] was going to go after once the corner followed the shallow cross.”

On his mindset with Allen and WR Mike Williams missing the game:

“I just embraced it and wanted to take advantage of the opportunity. I knew I was going to get targeted, so it was basically just one catch at a time.”

On his relationship with QB Justin Herbert:

“Even not focusing on last year, I feel like is just going week to week. We have been doing a lot of work in the office, after practice, before practice, and our relationship has grown a lot. I just look forward to the future with Justin.”

On his biggest takeaway from the win:

“Biggest takeaway is just to clean up the drops a little bit, especially on my part. I just try to focus on what I can control and what I need to work on. That drop that led to the pick was definitely something that I wish I could take back. I just took my eye off it way too early and it bounced off me and unfortunately got intercepted. To pull out a win playing the way we did, I’d say, unfortunately, is a little motivating just knowing that we could play a lot better.”

On his growth this season:

“I feel it is just very mental. My growth has been more mental than physical. My physical abilities, they will come, but my mental aspect is just knowing where to be, knowing how to be available for Justin [Herbert], knowing how to read these coverages, knowing where exactly to be in different coverages. Things like that.”

On the team celebration after yesterday’s win:

“It’s a great feeling when you win close like that. I wish we didn’t have to win close like that. I wish you could have blowouts every week, but it’s not realistic in the NFL. Our kicker came alive. [K Cameron] Dicker came alive and was able to seal it for us.”

On if there is a ‘fun element’ to have the team rally around the kicker after a win:

“Yeah. You’re excited when you get that last second win. What’s not exciting is everything that takes place before that. Maybe if that looked different, it’d be a different type of celebration, mentally. I’d say it’s fun, but I’d much rather have a boring win where we beat a team by a lot of points than having a sweet victory based off not playing our best football and it being slim at the end.”

On RB Austin Ekeler:

“He means a lot to the offense. We use him in the passing game. Obviously, he’s our starting running back and he brings 100 percent every week, so I’m really not surprised at the things he can do, especially that one play that got called back because his elbow was down. That was just exciting when Austin gets the ball and blocking for him, help him score a touchdown.”