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Chargers Week 16 Media Availability

Wednesday, December 22, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On if RB Austin Ekeler and WR Jalen Guyton were placed on Reserve/COVID-19 today:

“Jalen and Austin went on [Reserve/] COVID [-19] today and they’re day-to-day.”

On QB Chase Daniel and DL Joe Gaziano being placed on Reserve/COVID-19 yesterday:

“Same, day-to-day.”

On if all players currently on Reserve/COVID-19 could play on Sunday:

“The only two guys that are out, as of right now, are [OLB] Joey Bosa and [CB] Kemon Hall.”

On the Texans’ defense:

“I think you have to start with who’s coaching their defense. [Texans Associate Head Coach/Defensive Coordinator] Lovie Smith is one of the best defensive coaches in the history of the game. He was the architect of one of the best defenses of the last 30 years in Chicago, and, certainly, when he was the defensive coordinator with the Rams, they’ve always been known for taking the football away. That’s been a hallmark of wherever he’s been as a football coach. I have so much respect for him. He has taken it to the Texans. He’s taken a group where he’s really had to mix and match and use a lot of different combinations. They’re still playing at a really high level. Last week, they played a really good game against Jacksonville. Jacksonville has a lot of good players; they really do. I think that the more that you watch them, even early in this season, them taking on Cleveland, when they took on New England, when you go back a way, this team has been competitive the entire season. That record is not reflective of their coaching staff or their players. I have so much respect for Lovie Smith and the way that they’re playing on defense.”

On if the team has ‘separated’ QBs Justin Herbert and Easton Stick as a precaution:

“It’s been the same protocols with those two. Those guys have stayed socially distanced, like everybody else, and using their masks within the facility. Nothing new with those guys.”

On ‘what it would mean for the organization’ if Herbert is selected to the Pro Bowl:

“I think it would be a testament to him and his hard work. It’s a testament to his teammates. It’s a testament to his coaching staff. He’s certainly worthy of that selection. I think what he would tell you is that it’s because of his teammates. I think that we’ve had a really, really quality season around him. He’s been at the center of everything that we’ve done as a football team. I’m so proud of his season. I’m so proud of how he’s leading our football team. As proud as I am of his performance, just proud of him being a team captain and the way he affects us that way on a daily basis. Hoping for good news later on this evening.”

On 'what has impressed him' about Herbert:

"I think that the thing that I am so impressed with Justin is how much he improves week-to-week and how rapid that improvement is, because I think people realize how gifted he is and how special he is, but I don't think people are appreciating how much he's improving each week and the little things that he's improving at. There's still so far to go with his game, at the same time. That's the thing that I've been so impressed with. You don't know that until you get with a player. His hunger and that drive, that will that he has to become his best. I think that that's what's been impressive for me this season."

On an example of Herbert's improvement:

"Something that he's worked really hard at is playing with a base in the pocket, really playing with a base and being strong with the ball. What playing with a base allows you to do is, when it's crowded, it allows you to progress. The more narrow that your base is, the more that you're probably going to get sped up in your progression. Then, if you don't play with a base, when you have to throw accurately in the interior part of the field, you won't because you don't have your legs underneath you. I think that that's something that he's been able to do throughout this season, just playing with a base within the pocket, which allows him to progress more rapidly, and then be more accurate in the middle part of the field, whether it's the second level, the first level, a check-down. When I kind of talk about real quarterbacking, that's real quarterbacking stuff. I think that he's made big improvements. [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day has done a great job of working at it with him every single day, putting the focus on his feet, him and [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi]. I think he's gotten a lot better at that as the season has gone."

On S Derwin James Jr.:

"Derwin did not participate today. His spirits are high. We're just going to make sure that we manage him appropriately. He's feeling better than he was last week, but we just want to make sure that we bring them along the right way. His spirits are high."

On 'how big it would be' if T Rashawn Slater is selected to the Pro Bowl:

"It would be an outstanding achievement as a rookie. I've told you guys that I think the line of scrimmage is the most challenging transition to the NFL, from a physical standpoint. I think that's the most challenging physical transition, at that the line of scrimmage. I think the most challenging position to come to the NFL is quarterback, mentally. At the line of scrimmage, for him to perform at the level that he's performed in the run game and in the passing game, because it's not just in pass protection where he's excelled, he has excelled in the run game — as you guys have seen, we're running the ball at a high level right now, he's a big reason why. I think just his overall maturity, his composure, the mental part of the game — when you watch him, much like Justin [Herbert], he just doesn't make very many mental errors. There's so much that he's responsible for. I think that he just has real presence. It's such a credit to [General Manager] Tom [Telesco] and our scouting staff, [Director of College Scouting] Kevin Kelly, for identifying him and for making that decision. We're so fortunate to get him. His best is to come, too. He's nowhere near where he's going to be as a pro player. He continues to improve a lot. That's why you see him after practice all of the time working at his game. He's improving rapidly, too. He's getting a strong sense of who he's playing against and our scheme and what we want to accomplish. If that goes down, I'll be really proud of him, but definitely not surprised. He's definitely deserving."

On OLB Kyler Fackrell's 'timeline' for returning from Reserve/Injured:

"He is trending positive. The fact that he is on the field is a good sign. He's starting to run this week. Part of the progression is getting him running. He's kind of week-to-week right now. From a timeline standpoint, that's kind of where it is right now."

On T Bryan Bulaga:

"Bryan is the same way, week-to-week. He's been out on the field in the mornings, working out with our training staff. He's doing everything he can to get back. It's still week-to-week."

On Bulaga returning to the lineup:

“Bryan will have to get out there at practice for us in order for us to put them out there. I know how hard he is working on getting to that point. He’s doing everything in his power to do that. We’re trying to stay patient as much as possible. I know that I’m really proud of how he’s battled, because it hasn’t been easy. We’re just going to see where it goes.”

On DB Mark Webb Jr.:

“Mark Webb was out there today, as well, working out. Kind of like with Kyler [Fackrell], they’re returning to the practice field to run. It’s feeling better. It’s week-to-week.”

On Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach Frank Smith and Assistant Offensive Line Coach Shaun Sarrett’s contribution to offensive line development:

“I like to brag about our coaches because I think that they’re deserving of it. With Frank and Shaun, just from the beginning of training camp, number one, you’re onboarding a rookie left tackle who is the 13th pick in the draft. You’re onboarding five new starters into a new scheme, five new starters. For Bryan [Bulaga] to go down in the first game and for [T] Storm [Norton] to step right in, and then for [G] Oday [Aboushi] to go down in the fifth game and for us to pick up a player who was not on our team in training camp, I think that it says a lot about those guys. The fact that we were able to onboard [G/T] Senio [Kelemete] and get [T] Trey [Pipkins III] to start in our biggest game of the season at that point, and for us to play like we did offensively, I just think that that’s what you’re looking for in coaching — you’re looking for people that are outstanding with relationships and you’re looking for experts at their craft. The O-line room is such a tight-knit group. For us to onboard some of these veteran players, too, I think that there’s a real gift in bringing those guys together. Both Frank and Shaun have just done such a great job for our football team. We wanted to be a line-of-scrimmage team here. We knew that you have to be if you want to be a contending team in this league, consistently. I think that we’ve shown that our O-line has been a strength of our team. I’m really proud of those two coaches and proud of the O-line group because they’ve really come together, as a group, to have a quality season.”

On the defense:

“What we’ve done in the second half of the season since the bye, we’ve made huge improvements in the run game. I was talking to [Director of Football Research] Aditya [Krishnan] yesterday, I think that we’re ninth or something like that after the bye in EPA [expected points added] with rush defense. I thought that if you take a take away [Chiefs QB Patrick] Mahomes’ scramble the other night, that was like 35 yards, I think we were outstanding in the run front. I think that we’ve made really big improvements there. I know that in our first six games, we didn’t have our best stuff. I think that we’ve really made big improvements there. I think what that’s allowed us to do is control the pace of the game more. I think that what we’ve done with our group is we’ve battled a lot of attrition on defense. There have been a lot of different combinations. I think that we have figured it out as we’ve gone. We’ve really had to figure it out, especially in the secondary because we have not had a lot of continuity there. I think that we’ve done a really good job of sticking together and playing quality defense. The other night against that group for really three-and-a-half quarters, I thought that we played about as well as you can play against that group. I think that was a good measuring stick for us, and then where we can go. Learning from the last half of the fourth quarter, and then in overtime, I think it shows you where we need to continue to grow. Probably what I’ve been maybe most pleased with since the bye is we’ve taken the football away. We’ve really turned the ball over, which has been a big point of emphasis with the strip-sacks, with the interceptions. We’ve been able to do that consistently. It has created more opportunities for our offense and has created more points. I think that that’s been a real strength of ours. What we have to be able to do here down the stretch, for me, anyway, on defense, is if we can onboard these guys that have been out — [S] Alohi [Gilman], [CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.], get Derwin [James Jr.] back healthy — I know that we can play good enough defense to play against anybody. That’s going to be paramount for us. If we can get our guys back, then I know that we’re going to be in good shape.”

On 'positives' offensively from last week's game:

"I really felt like we went into the game with a good plan against Kansas City, about how we wanted to control the game and how we wanted to protect the passer. In the run game and in the past protection game, we set out to accomplish what we accomplished. I felt like Justin [Herbert] did a good job throwing the ball accurately. I felt like, in the passing game, we made a lot of consistent, winning plays in that game. We did not punt in the game and we had over 425 [yards] of total offense, and I felt like the balance of the run and the pass, I felt like we really kept them off balance all night, which I think is an important step of your offense. Do you feel like you are controlling the game that way? I feel like our offense is continuing to evolve. The last couple of weeks, I just really like the way that we've run the football because everyone knows how we can throw the football, but just being able to control the pace and do it in a variety of ways with a variety of people. Our three runners all touched the ball, and I thought that that was a good sign that we had three runners have a hand in our success. I think that, offensively, we need just need to continue to have a clean operation. If we continue to have a clean operation, stay secure with the ball, then I think that good things are going to happen."

WIDE RECEIVER KEENAN ALLEN

On 'what it would mean to him' if selected to the Pro Bowl for the fifth-straight season:

"It would mean a lot; consistency and availability, being there for the team, being there to make plays when it's time to make plays and staying consistent."

On testing positive for COVID-19:

"It was kind of like being sick. You know when you're in elementary school or high school and you're sick, you stay home and everybody is at school? You wanted to stay home, but then you had to stay home. I didn't want to stay anymore. It was one of those things. A fever and a runny nose for five days or something."

On how he felt physically during the game:

"I felt good. My breathing was good. My family was worried about my lungs, with how COVID [-19] affects the lungs and all of that stuff. Breathing felt fine, so everything was good."

On the team's confidence:

"More positive, just confident. We should have won the game. Usually, I'm mad in those moments. I don't know why, I just felt good about it. The offense played pretty good. I felt like we could have made those plays on the fourth downs, and on third down. We should have made those plays. It's just a lot to build on."

On referring to the end zone as 'the box':

"That's the box. That's the dance box."

On his pass attempt to WR Mike Williams:

"I was definitely rushed. We never practiced against Cover-2 all week. When I got the ball, I saw all of the rotations. I saw [Chiefs S] Tyrann [Mathieu] running over. Now, mind you, that's my favorite safety, so I'm nervous already. Boom, I get the ball and see Tyrann running over, so I'm spooking in my mind. I watched the film, he took a little false step, so I had more time than I thought. I rushed it. Mike wasn't looking at me when I threw it, so I tried to do some [Buccaneers QB] Tom Brady stuff. It didn't work out how it was supposed to."

On QB Justin Herbert:

"My MVP. He balling. He's going crazy. He leading us his second year. He's just making outstanding play after outstanding play. 300-yard games, he has the most of them. He's a savage. He's throwing touchdowns to everybody on the field. He's ridiculous."

On blocking:

"It's just effort. You don't want to be the guy on the film not blocking. I don't want my guy to make the tackle. Being in the right spot at the right time, knowing your leverage and understanding where we're trying to go."

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER UCHENNA NWOSU

On his role 'has change this week' due to other outside linebackers being placed on Reserve/COVID-19:

"My role stays the same. It's about getting guys more prepared. They work hard in practice and prepare for these moments. It's a next-man-up mentality. We have guys like K9 [LB Kenneth Murray Jr.] and E [OLB Emeke Egbule]. We're short-handed, but those guys prepare hard and work hard. They're ready."

On 'gaining ground' in the AFC playoff standings:

"It's very important. We have this conversation all of the time in the locker room about where we stand and what we have to do. How can you not? With the standings being so close, everybody is right there, every game is important and every game is a playoff game. Everybody is focused on the details. We just have to play through it and see what happens."

On Murray's edge-rushing capabilities:

"It's looking good. He definitely has all of the physical attributes to be on the edge. He did a little bit of it in college, in regard to rushing the passer and coming off the edge. I'm excited to see Kenneth play. He's putting in the work. He has the attributes for it. I just can't wait to see him go to work."

On the improvement in the run defense:

"It's a testament to who we are as a team. We come together, figure out what the issues are, sit down and have a man-to-man talk with each other. Enough is enough. We've decided to come together. We've been able to put it all behind us. It's a long year. We know we're in the fight. The offense has been putting up numbers, we figured it was our turn to do our job."

On if the team is 'more brutally honest' in film reviews this season:

"I wouldn't say it's more brutally honest, but it's more of an attention to detail. Every year that I've been here, any time that there needs to be a correction, I feel like that coaches have got on it. Whether it was [Lions Offensive Coordinator and former Chargers Head Coach Anthony] Lynn's staff or [Head Coach] Brandon Staley's staff. I just feel like there's more attention to detail, especially with us being in the hunt this year. A lot more guys are focused, they are more ready and they see this opportunity."

On teammates being placed on Reserve/COVID-19:

"It's definitely an obstacle when you lose some of your best players on both sides of the ball. Like I said earlier, we have a next-man-up mentality. Everybody has been working and practicing hard. Guys are preparing for this moment. Guys are eager to get on the field to show what they can actually do offense, defense and special teams-wise. I'm proud of everybody and how they are working. We're ready to roll."

On the defense's performance last week:

"Besides [Chiefs QB Patrick] Mahomes' last two scrambles, we were stopping the run game. I think without those two scrambles, they didn't have that many rushing yards. That's a testament to what we've been talking about all year, especially after the bye week, emphasizing how we have to stop the run game and make teams one-dimensional. The positives that we're carrying over are continuing to stop the run."