

Chargers Week 16 Media Availability

Thursday, December 22, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On S Derwin James Jr. returning to practice today:

“Derwin [James Jr.] was back at practice today. He’s progressing well. It was good to get him back out there. Hopefully, he will have a good week of practice, then see where it goes and be ready to play.”

On CB J.C. Jackson’s situation:

“We’re still acquiring the facts about what is going on in that particular matter. When we know more information, we’ll get more information to you.”

On James Jr.’s impact on the team:

“He’s one of the captains of our team, one of the top players in the league. I certainly think that he is one of the faces of our franchise. It’s going to be great to have him back. I thought that he really lifted our team while he was away. I thought that he did a lot of things behind the scenes to help that group play well, and I thought that it was important that we played well without him. Since he has been playing on this team, I think that it was the first time that we have really played at a high level without him out there. To get him back and be able to integrate him into our defense, it’s just going to make us that much stronger. His leadership, what he does for his teammates, how he affects his teammates, that will be big, as well. We’re going to need all of his experience down the stretch here.”

On the challenge of preparing for the Colts:

“You know the heart of their offense and what they’re trying to accomplish. You have enough evidence to see who they are and what they want to be. There’s enough evidence on the new quarterback and what he has done in his career. He has played in this offense kind of everywhere that he has been. We have a good frame of reference to how he has played before. Take all of that into account. It’s still about the players that they have on that team. They have a lot of good players on their football team, specifically on offense. We have a lot of respect for them. We just have to have a good week of practice and be ready for the game.”

On the defense ‘coming out of the discovery phase’:

“For a lot of the players that may have been new for us, I think that that is probably accurate. There were just a lot of players playing in new roles, up front and in the secondary. We had never seen them play before. We had seen them practice all the time, but being able to see them in games and in your system, playing against quality people, I think that is certainly true, that it was a discovery process. I think that we have a lot better picture of how to use them now — now that they have been in games — and what their strengths are. The picture has changed for us all season. Within every team, you’re going through that the whole way. Very few teams are fortunate enough to keep their crew together. You always have to be searching for the best way to use your guys. Now, a lot of these guys who are new, I think that we have a lot better sense of how to use them. And, they’re playing really good within the framework of our team, playing our style of football. I think that is what you’ve seen the last two weeks, the style of football that we believe in, with the way that we’ve been able to play it.”

On the Colts' loss to the Vikings and the impact that could potentially have on a team:

“Well, they’ve beaten a lot of quality teams this year. They beat the Chiefs, the Raiders, the Broncos. I think that Dallas is playing as well as anybody in the league, and going into the fourth quarter, it was 21-19. Then, Minnesota, who just won their division and is having an outstanding season, they were up 33-0 at halftime. You know what this team is capable of doing because they’ve done it. They have a lot of quality leadership on their football team. When you take a look at who is out there for them in all three phases, they have a lot of outstanding leaders on that football team — guys who are proven NFL players, not just as premium NFL players, but leaders within a football team. Obviously, their head coach was one of the top players of his generation and a Hall-of-Fame type of player. You just respect everybody that’s over there and you know that in the NFL, sometimes, things happen. Every week in the NFL, something like that happens. We’re going to be prepared for their best because they have a lot of good coaches and players on their football team. All you have to do is watch the game film and watch them compete every time that they play. Their guys play extremely hard, and they have a lot of good players. We’re expecting a really tough game on Monday night.”

On success over the last two games ‘carrying over from week-to-week’:

“We’ve had results long before these last two [games]. It may not be in these shut-down, lock-down performances, but we’ve had them, just haven’t had them back-to-back all of the time. Our guys have seen our way of playing and what we can do. I think that we’ve just been able to get the continuity of the players playing together. I think that that has been something that has been missing for us. Now that you’re seeing these guys play together, you’re seeing them play better together. We have to build on that. Like I said, we’ve been able to evaluate a lot more guys. I think that we’re going to be able to, hopefully, establish the depth that we need down the stretch in order to play our best football. That is what I’ve liked about the last two weeks. It is probably the best that we’ve played all season. There have been a couple of performances that, I think, were similar, but to have them back-to-back against two really quality teams, that is what you’re shooting for at this time of the year.”

On depth and performance along the defensive line:

“A really good group of guys, number one. We have great coaches up front. [Run Game Coordinator/Defensive Line] Jay Rodgers, [Defensive Assistant] John Timu and [Outside Linebackers] Giff Smith, those three guys, I think the world of them. I think that they have done an excellent job all year. Up front, it’s been both inside and outside that we’ve had to adjust and I think that those coaches have done a really good job of adjusting. The guys leading the way, the leaders up front — [DL] Sebastian [Joseph-Day], [OLB] Kyle [Van Noy] and [OLB] Khalil [Mack] — they’re keeping everybody together. When we onboard these new guys, they are teaching the guys and taking it even further. I think that those guys deserve so much credit for being able to do that. We’ve adjusted our gameplans to play to the strength of the group that we have, and not ask them to do things that, maybe, we would ask some of the other guys that we started the season with. That’s all part of the process. The new guys that have stepped in are really hard-working guys that play our type of football. We’re going to need them to continue to step up these last games of the regular season.”

On S Alohi Gilman’s growth:

“He has provided us with a lot of energy out there. He’s very calm. He’s a commander back there. I think that the guys like playing with him because he has a real command of our defense and the scouting report. He’s a connector back there. He’s an energy guy. He was a captain at Notre Dame. You can see that he has a lot of those leadership characteristics. He has a lot of the gameday energy that you need within a football team. He has made plays for us. He has tackled extremely well. He has taken good angles in the deep part of the field when he has been challenged. He has been around the football. That is what you need when you’re an NFL safety; you need to be able to do all of those things. He also allows us, when Derwin [James Jr.] is here, to play where Derwin is very effective, which is all over the place. Having Alohi [Gilman] out there allows us to do it. With Derwin down the last couple of weeks, I really think that a bright spot for our defense is the way that him and [S] Nasir [Adderley] have played together.”

On the arrangement of safeties on Sunday:

“You’re going to see all three of them in the game. Nasir [Adderley] and Alohi [Gilman] have both earned the opportunity to play. We’re going to play all three of them — Derwin [James Jr.], obviously, but Alohi and Nas are both playing well for us, and we see them both as starters for us.”

On players stepping in for injured players and playing well:

“It says a lot about the depth of our team that we have enough guys to be able to do it. Even [OLB] Chris Rumph was out for a stretch there. We were able to onboard some new guys and guys stepped up and made plays. I think [OLB] Kyle Van Noy and [OLB] Khalil [Mack] have really led the way on the edge for us, but we have had quality contributions from so many guys and it has been the same way in the secondary. I think [S Alohi Gilman] Lo, what he has been able to do I think for our defense is really giving us confidence out there. You get confidence through communication, I think, in the secondary. That is where you create confidence is everybody being connected. I think Lo does a great job of that for us. That is something that [S] Derwin [James Jr.] just has made such a big impact doing is connecting everybody. Lo has that same ability and now that Nasir [Adderley] has played for us for two years, those guys are playing well together. They have that good chemistry. That is a big part of playing team sports is your chemistry and I think that the last two weeks, we have had that. We’re going to need to continue to build that as we go because [DL Joe Gaziano] Joe G is down, now we have to have Chris [Rumph II] step up for us and play quality football. Chris [Rumph] played in the Miami game when Sebastian [Joseph-Day] was out. He has had to do that before, and that is what we have to keep doing. We have to keep bringing guys in and get them playing quality football.”

On OL Jamaree Salyer:

“Jamaree [Salyer] has been a real bright spot for our team. He has been one of those guys that we are sure glad we drafted. He has a lot of the make-up that allows you to have a season that we are having right now, when your All-Pro left tackle [Rashawn Slater] goes down, you are able to put a rookie in there who is ready for his opportunity. He has outstanding make-up. He played at one of the top programs in all of college football, blocking those guys every day in practice and competing against them every single week. We really felt like that was a big reason why you drafted him. He played left tackle in college, so it wasn’t as big of a deal for him from a transition standpoint, from a positional standpoint. He is really tough. He is really smart. When he says, ‘Everything is a learning experience,’ I think that shows you about his make-up because he knows you never have it figured out in the NFL, especially at left tackle in the league. He keeps improving. He keeps understanding, ‘Who am I blocking? What are we trying to do? What is our plan?’ He has allowed us to compete. You see it around the league, a lot of times if you get cleaned out on the offensive line, it’s really difficult to compete because of how good these defensive fronts are. He has been a real bright spot for our football team and I can’t say enough about how he has played for us this year.”

On the sideline exchange between DL Sebastian Joseph-Day and LB Drue Tranquill last week:

“I look at it as extremely healthy -- like, a really great sign. As the head coach and a disadvantage, I used to be able to go back with them and see that all unfold. Now, I can’t because I am watching special teams and offense. I was made aware of this on the headset and then being able to see it live, just so excited to see that. Two people that care and if you kind of knew the backstory, then there is the thing that the fans don’t see. They see something and they maybe think it’s one thing, when it’s really not. That was one of those things that was happening there at that point and time. What you see is probably not what you probably perceived. That’s the other part about playing football, when you see people getting heated, there is always a story behind it. You just need to find what it is. It is one of those things is that it brought us closer together. We were able to laugh about it in front of the team. I just think you can’t have enough passion in football. When you see that on the football field, you have to get the facts first about what happened. That particular instance, I am not saying every instance is this way, but that particular instance was really good for our team. Really good.”

On the backstory between Joseph-Day and Tranquill’s exchange:

“I’ll let the guys tell you. *[laughter]*. I will let them tell you. Open locker room, you might as well go ask them and see if they tell you the truth *[laughter]*.”

On traveling the team over the holiday season:

“The big thing for everybody is that you want to make sure that everybody gets to create memories with their families. It’s part of our job as professionals like the NFL season is going around Christmas. So, every Christmas, every team is going to have to go through that, so you know it is a part of your rhythm and routine. You want to make sure the best you can that they get that experience with their families, that they can create memories with their immediate families, with their friends, by the schedule that you have. In return, hopefully, what you get is that full energy back because it’s a big part of being a man is being able to go experience life with your people. Hopefully, they can do that and then we have a Christmas morning, a full Christmas morning with our families, and then we leave later that day. Hopefully, that fills you up so that you can go out and compete in front of the world on Monday night. Luckily, the schedule works out this year where we can do Christmas Eve and Christmas Day with our families. To me, it’s really just about them being able to be with their families, all of us, so that you can go compete as good as you can.”

On if he addresses last year’s situation of playoff seeding with the team this year:

“I am not going to go back to the past. I don’t think that is an effective strategy because there are so many guys who weren’t even here. I think what is most relevant is what is in front of you and what is relevant is what is going on with our team, not last season’s team, regardless of if it had gone well or not. Our focus is really on this group of guys and this week of practice with where our team is and then our opponent. That is kind of I think, to me, the recipe as you get towards the end of your season, you have to make it about your team, not anybody else’s team or not everybody else’s situation. I think if we put the focus there, then we’ll make the improvements we need to make to be as good as we can be.”

On Colts QB Nick Foles:

“You know what he is capable of. You know what he has done in the league. You know what he has accomplished and won a Super Bowl. I was in Chicago in 2018 when he was a starting quarterback, and we lost a really tough game to them. We played against him in 2020 when I was with the Rams and he was with Chicago. You just know that he has a lot of experience. He has made a lot of winning plays and you have full respect for what he has accomplished in the league. The reason why he has been in the league so long is because he is a quality player. They obviously feel like he is a good enough player to be starting in this football game. I know that I have had a ton of respect for him from afar and he has our players’ full respect because many of them have competed against him. We’re going to need to be at our best because he has seen a lot, seen a lot of looks, knows that offense inside and out. We’re going to have to play at a high level on Monday.”

On S Derwin James Jr. and OLB Khalil Mack being named Pro Bowl Games starters:

“They are certainly deserving, as are a bunch of our guys. To me, it’s about where our team is going and I think that they will tell you the same thing is where our team is going. That’s where our focus is right now, and all of the individual stuff will take care of itself as we go.”