# **TRANSCRIPTS**

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# **Chargers Week 2 Media Availability**

Wednesday, September 15, 2021 ≠ Hoag Performance Center ≠ Costa Mesa, Calif.

#### **HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY**

# On what it will take to defeat the Cowboys on Sunday:

"Playing a team game. I think that we have to play a team game against this group. I think that they're really good. They have a lot of good players. Offensively, I think what makes them such a challenge to cover is that they're deep in all levels of their offense. You start with their offensive line, that group has played a lot of ball together. Them getting [Cowboys G] Zack Martin back, he's one of the elite players in the league. Him and [Cowboys T] Tyron Smith are two of the elite linemen of the last decade. You start there with their foundation, then you go to their runner [Cowboys RB Ezekiel Elliott], who is one of the top two to five runners in the league. Zeke is a complete back. He's one of the best backs that I've played against. Then, they have a really deep receiving corps; [Cowboys WRs] CeeDee [Lamb], Amari [Cooper] — I know that [Michael] Gallup isn't playing, but he's fantastic, as well — [Cedrick] Wilson [Jr.] has come in and done a nice job. Last year when we played them, I had a lot of respect for [Cowboys TE Blake] Jarwin going into the game. He has real speed. He got hurt in our game last year, so he didn't really get to play last season, but going into that game I had a lot of respect for him. Then, [Cowboys TE Dalton] Schultz came in and, I think, did a nice job for that team last year. Now, they're playing together a lot. You finish with their quarterback. When you have a quarterback like [Cowboys QB] Dak Prescott, his resume speaks for itself. I think that the value of Dak Prescott really expressed itself last season when they didn't have him. After our game, I think that he went 400 [passing yards], 400, 500, or something like that. He certainly got off to a great start this year. That just shows you his toughness, his leadership ability, and then his play-making ability, his talent. They have a very complete offense. We're going to have to have a really good week of practice."

#### On if T Bryan Bulaga will practice today:

"He will not practice today."

#### On Cowbovs QB Dak Prescott:

"I've followed this guy since Mississippi State. They were number one in the country, at Mississippi State, in the SEC West with this guy. This guys has been a proven guy for a long time. Since he's played for the Cowboys, their record speaks for itself with him as the quarterback — and their production. Going back to last year, they were number one in the NFL in total offense the year before I was with the Rams. Then, they were leading the NFL in offense through four or five weeks, and then he got hurt. Then, he lit it up Week 1 against the defensive Super Bowl champions, against a defense that's really, really good. His track record speaks for itself. He's a guy that's very worthy of that contract. He's an elite competitor. We're excited to be able to face him this week."

# On the 'chess match' that he's anticipating against Prescott and the Cowboys offense:

"It's a big chess match because their line has seen a lot, too. Their line is outstanding. When you have Tyron [Smith] and Zack [Martin], who have seen so much, I feel like that's a winning edge for them. [Cowboys Head Coach] Mike McCarthy and [Cowboys Offensive Coordinator] Kellen Moore, those guys are two premium offensive coaches in this league. They have a really good offensive team. A big part of that is matchups. We have to play a complementary game defensively because they can hurt you in a lot of different ways. It's not like you go into a gameplan against this team saying, 'Well, pass, run, whatever.' They can beat you in a lot of different ways. When you're playing against a complete offense, you have to play complete defense. Not only a complete defense, but you have to play a complete game as a team, offensively and in the kicking game. We'll see where it goes this week."

# On defending the Cowboys run game offensively:

"Zeke [Cowboys RB Ezekiel Elliott], I just have so much respect for this guy. This guy is one of the most complete back in the league. He's an incredible runner, he has balance, body control, vision. He plays with great pace. He's really good on contact. He has outstanding hands out of the backfield. He's a very, very good pass protector. I don't think he gets enough credit for that. That's a big part of his game. He's really physical in pass protection. He's smart. This guy is as good as it gets. I truly felt like, in Week 1, that gameplan was just a reflection of how Tampa was playing him. If they weren't playing him that way, then I'm sure that he would've had a really healthy dose of touches. I think that it just goes to show you how dangerous they are that Zeke Elliott a productive factor running the ball, but they still put up the amount of yards that they did. They're just a very dangerous team. I don't think Zeke gets enough credit for how he played in that game. That's a really, really good rush that they were playing against. For Dak [Prescott] to throw for that many yards, Zeke had a big hand in making that happen."

#### On if DL Justin Jones will practice today:

"Justin Jones is going to be limited today."

#### On CB Michael Davis' performance against Washington:

"Big, big opportunity last week. As you guys know, I had a lot of respect for [Washington WR] Terry McLaurin, a lot of respect for that group of receivers. We'll see how they play tomorrow night, but I think that team is going to have a good year. I think it was a good first game for Vato. There was some really good. There was some reps that I think, from a technical standpoint, he can get better at, for sure. He went nose-to-nose with those guys at a high level. If you talk to him, he knows that he can play a lot better, which is exciting. But we're pleased with where his progress is. He's diving into his game every day. I think his physical talents will continue to show the more that he works at his game, overall, from a mental standpoint, from a technique standpoint. But we're really pleased. This guy has real toughness, Mike Davis. He has real toughness. I expect him to continue to improve."

# On preparing the offense for the Cowboys defense:

"Number one, I have a ton of respect for [Cowboys Defensive Coordinator] Dan Quinn as a coach. Everyone's aware that this guy's a Super Bowl coach. He was a Super Bowl champion as a defensive coordinator in Seattle. This guy is a really, really good coach. I think it's kind of be a blend of his background — and I have a ton of respect for [Cowboys Defensive Passing Game Coordinator/Secondary] Joe Whitt Jr., the passing game coordinator there, and [Cowboys Sr. Defensive Assistant] George Edwards is there, who has been a defensive coordinator in this league — so I think it'll be a blend of all that. When you're brand new, you're trying to figure out your pieces and getting them where you want them and stuff like that. I think what definitely expressed itself in the first game is that they're going to play hard. That's a staple of Dan Quinn; they're going to play really hard. They're talented. They have a lot of players on that group. They're at the beginning, so they're trying to get it together just like we are. But I expect a team that plays really, really tough. They want to takeaway battle in the first game, which gave them a real chance in that game. That's always been a hallmark of a Dan Quinn operation, hunting the football. That showed up in the first game, too."

# On winning the season opener:

"It was good to get into the routine of game week. It was our first time traveling together, in the context of a game week — East Coast trip and stuff like that. From an operational standpoint, I think it was good to just go through that together; leaving Saturday, waking up early, doing that whole thing. After the game, learning how that plane trip home is going to be, what that rhythm is going to look like. I felt like it was good to get that underway. Then, in terms of the game, what you have to be able to do in first games is be able to get better as the game goes on, and I think that's what we did. I know that we started fast on both sides of the ball, but then in that middle area, it was a real fight. We kind of lost some of the momentum. Then, what you got to be able to do is in the fourth quarter, you have to make the adjustments at the end of the game in all three phases to be able to finish the game plan your best, even when in that middle ground, you may not have played perfectly or the way you would want. I felt like in the fourth quarter, we made some good adjustments and then finished the game plan our best ball. It was just a hard-fought win. Most of the time, when you go on the road against a really good team, that's how it's going to be. I felt like that was the positive coming out of it."

# On if the 'mistakes made on Sunday' can be fixed this week in practice:

"For sure. You guys are probably aware of that game, where between game one and game two, you make your biggest jump and all that — I think that you make a big jump every week, I really do, because you learned so much. Out there on the walk-through, we were just so much better than we were on Sunday because we're just had so much to learn from. There are going to be a million things that come up this week to get better at, but I think that when you are brand new, with systems, the more you experience, the more you know how to fix your problems, and the quicker you get to fix them. I felt like that was a good thing coming out of the game, there wasn't a lot that happened that our guys weren't like, 'Hey, that's how I fix it.' I felt like we had a pretty good response time in that way. What's going to happen as you go is now we're playing against different teams, like Dallas' his defense is different than Washington's, Dallas' offense is different than Washington's. Now, I play against this style, and this is how we want to play. It's just such an ongoing thing."

# On the benefit of having Defensive Coordinator Renaldo Hill in the coaches booth:

"This guy is so steady, guys. This guy is a cool customer. You know that [former ESPN sportscaster] Stuart Scott quote, 'As cool as the other side of the pillow,' that's R-Hill. That's why he was such a good player. [Assistant Secondary Coach] Tommy Donatell's up there, and he's a G up there. They just have such good field vision. It's so comforting for us on the field because they can fix a lot of problems up there. They have a lot of awareness of personnel. They can spot some things that sometimes your sightline on the field may not be as good, your vantage point. I felt like the other winning edge for me personally is that it allows me to be a head coach, and not, 'Hey, I'm over here with the defense every second.' I can be current with the game management side of things and special teams and the offense. I felt like I could be my best self because Renaldo Hill is our defensive coordinator. He's making some big adjustments for us so that I can go be with [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] and [Special Teams Coordinator] Derius [Swinton II] and our kicking game."

#### On the offense's balance between run and pass against Washington:

"I really loved the balance. I loved our run game plan. Any time that you play against a premium front in this league, it's going to be difficult to run it. It just is. I think what doesn't show up on the stat sheet, because we had 29 [attempts] for 90 [yards], but we had a couple of RPOs, we had a couple of quick throws from under center that's an extension of your run game. If you factored in those throws to your run game, I think you would look at the run game even with more positivity because that's kind of an extension of the run game. You have a run called, and then now you're able to throw it out there based on the look. We did that a couple of times in the game. Just from a pure run standpoint, I felt like with our backs, our [run] tracks were good. I felt like our O-line came off the ball with velocity and our tight ends and fullbacks came off the ball with velocity, which is what we were hoping to do. Then, we were ball secure. That's a really talented front that we were playing against, and a really good linebacking corps, and two safeties from Washington that are outstanding tacklers — [Washington S Kamren] Curl and [Washington S] Landon Collins are outstanding runsupport safeties. We're off to a good start, but there's always so much more room to improve."

# On QB Justin Herbert's fumble that went out of the back of the endzone for a touchback and if he contacted the League Office for potential clarification:

"We try to do that — unpack every game — so that we can learn from it, like all the penalties that happened, some of the rulings, to get a better sense of our strategies moving forward. I'm finding now with the way they're doing it, your process with challenging, that communication process. I think that we're going to try and do the best we can to educate our players, and, as coaches, understand the rhythm and timing of how they're officiating things and how they're reviewing things. Keep going as they go because I think that we're still learning as we go with the new system, so all of the clarification that we can get benefits us."

# On his communication with the staff in the coaches booth on Sunday and if there were any calls that he was looking for further clarification on:

"The one specifically was [Washington QB Ryan] Fitzpatrick's backward pass, which I felt like was a backward pass, when [OLB] Uchenna [Nwosu] had the nice hit on him. It was in the first half, so I felt like it was a worthy challenge, just to get it out there. It was one of those, 'Hey, we don't know, but this is probably worth it to challenge it, to take a look at it.' What ended up happening was New York ended up talking to [Referee] Alex Kemp, and then he kind of said, 'We've already ruled on this, we can pick it up.' That was kind of what happened in that sequence."

# On if he 'likes' the league's updated replay protocol that further involves review from the officiating center in New York:

"I think I hate being in the middle, but I feel like I need to like experience more to make my mind up about it truly. I think I'm just so new. I still think that I need to have more experiences before I can make a ruling on that."

# On working with members of his support staff in the coaches booth to determine when to potentially challenge a ruling on the field:

"Those guys are those guys were awesome up there. They were awesome. On fourth down and situational stuff, I felt like we were able to really triangulate with [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi]. He was able to call the game that he wanted to call because he had a lot of certainty where I was coming from. Obviously, so many things to improve on, but I felt like we were proud of our process. Like I said, situationally, I was disappointed with before the half, us giving up the field goal with the penalty, then allowing a loose play scramble to get out of bounds. I could have been in a better coverage there, for sure, that could have protected the sideline more, more deny of the ball on the outside. That was my mistake. I'll be better moving forward."

#### On RB Larry Rountree III's performance on Sunday:

"This guy brought real physicality. He's just a different style back. [RB] Austin is really good at breaking tackles, it's just that his dimensions are different. Austin's not big, but he's really, really strong, where Larry's a bigger guy, but he's really, really strong. He's heavier; he's a heavier back. I thought that Larry did a nice job in the kicking game, as well. Your third back has to be a factor on the kicking game. I feel like Larry is really coming on. He's still at the beginning. We're trying, the best we can, for this got to become a complete back, and not just as running back but as a football player."

#### On if Elliott 'catches his attention today as it did a few years ago':

"Yes. He has my full attention. I have full respect for this back. My eyes tell me that this guy is a top two to five back in this league. Playing against him last year, what was unique is I could hear everything last year. There was no crowd, so I could hear the sound of every tackle. I remember going home and watching the TV copy with my wife. It was late, but she stayed up and we watched it. You could hear it; you could hear the past popping. He's a physical guy. I have full respect for him and what he's accomplished in this league. I still think he's a premium back."

# On the relationship between C Corey Linsley and QB Justin Herbert:

"Operationally, we had a clean operation, pre-snap. You go on the road for the first time, and we didn't have any procedure penalties. We didn't have any 12 in the huddle late, having to burn a timeout. Didn't have any of those things which is a credit to [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi and] Justin. Joe went out one time, his earpiece went out one time. Justin fixed the problem and called the play. He got us in and out, which I thought was a great sign. Those two guys talked through the protection plan and mixed it up from a cadence standpoint. They were able to draw a couple offsides penalties, which I thought was critical. Corey plays a big role in that. Those guys teaming up is a big advantage of us."

#### On involving RB Austin Ekeler in the passing scheme:

"He's definitely a weapon in the passing game. We had a couple things up for him that didn't get called. When we were in some of our stuff where we were split out, the ball just went other places. But that's a big part of our offense, getting him activated in the passing game. Whether it's from the backfield, split out, or in the screen game. Excited to see how that expresses itself as the weeks go on. He's definitely an asset to us, for sure."

#### On S Derwin James Jr.:

"What Derwin allows you to do is force and offense from an identification standpoint. To locate where he's at, to determine how they're going to identify this structure. I think that's an advantage, where you're forcing them to exert mental energy every snap. To number one locate him, and then how does that fit in to what I'm looking at? It gives us an advantage. Them having to identify him as a rusher, possibly a known rusher, affects some things. When we can put him all the different places we put him, sometimes it helps the other guys, too. It helps their production. You're able to play with more premium looks. He's the rare chess piece that you hope to coach someday. I thought he was outstanding in his first performance. Not just from a playing standpoint, but his leadership and his ability to be a signal-caller; get us in the right adjustments. Steady our group in the middle block, where we were fighting hard. He was able to keep us steady. And then in that fourth quarter, he really brought us home, defensively. I thought he had an outstanding first game."

# On his use of 'express yourself' regarding play-calling:

"I think there's an artistic nature to what's happening out there. Sometimes, whether it's how a route expresses itself, we say, 'Hey, it's unveiling, it's revealing itself as the play is going on there.' What the word does for the players is, 'Hey, we have to unpack this. It isn't black and white. It's not black and white.' When something is expressing, we have to deal in the gray. That language I use for defensive football or offensive football, that's the reason why I use it. Expressing yourself within the defense is letting your game shine within what we're doing. Being able to play your game within what we do on all three phases of the game. I like that phrase because as a player, you feel like you can be you. You can add your personality, your flavor to this movie. I think that's important. Otherwise, they feel like you're putting shackles on their game and they're just playing a part in the movie, instead of saying, 'I'm starring in this movie.' That's why I do that."

# On S Nasir Adderley's injury status:

"Nas is going to be questionable today. He was in the walk-through; he's questionable today."

#### On the AFC West going undefeated in Week 1:

"I can't really speak on that because I haven't really seen those games. I know that all three of these teams in our division are really good. It's like where I was last year. I know they've all got coaches, all three of them have quarterbacks. All three of them have improved a lot, defensively. There's a lot of fire-power in this division. A lot of people talk about the offenses, but defensively, there are a lot of star players, too, on these four teams. It's a competitive division that's well-coached. I'm not surprised at all by that."

#### **QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**

#### On WRs KJ Hill Jr. and Jalen Guyton:

"They've done an incredible job picking up the offense. It's not an easy offense, and we touched on that last week. For them to come into this offense and have such a good feel for some of those routes that they ran in the zone. To be able to sit down, give me their eyes. That's huge from them."

#### On the Cowboys defense:

"They forced a lot of turnovers last week, and that's something we have to be smart about going into this week. We need to emphasize fundamentals and ball security. They did a good job forcing turnovers last week, and they have some athletic guys. Some of those linebackers are some of the best in the world. It's a tough defense, but a good opportunity for us."

# On the Cowboys secondary:

"They've got some really good cover guys. They run some pretty good coverages and they're well-coached. It's going to be on us to find our matchups and win those."

# On the AFC West going undefeated in Week 1:

"I think it's a tough division. Going back to last year and having played those guys, I've always thought highly of the AFC West. Certainly the Chiefs, Broncos and Raiders all played well last week."

# On Dan Quinn's defense with the Cowboys:

"It's a little different. Last year when we played the Falcons, it doesn't show up into what they played last week. We're going off the preseason games that the Cowboys played, kind of putting together a game plan. It's not like what the Falcons ran last year."

# On Cowboys LB Micah Parsons:

"He's one of those guys that you have to block. You have to find him wherever he is on the field, and he's been able to do plenty of good things on defense. Whether he's lined up over tight ends or running backs, or whether he's blitzing. He's been all over the field making plays."

#### On Cowboys QB Dak Prescott:

"I met him a couple times. We throw with the same quarterback coach, Jon Beck. I talked to him briefly about how I'm excited to watch him play this year. Hopefully he stays healthy. Coming back from one of those injuries is never easy, but he's done an incredible job battling back. I wish him nothing but the best."

#### On the final drive on Sunday's game:

"The mindset is always to keep getting first downs. As long as you're moving the chain, you're wasting time and you're getting the ball down the field. Whenever you're backed up like that, and you have to punt, you're putting your defense in a tough position. As long as we can get the ball out of our backed-up endzone, get the ball moving. Fortunately, we put together quite a drive and wasted the rest of the clock. It was good for us."

#### On his timing in the pocket:

"It's a lot of things. Having great protection is obviously one of the biggest things for us. Having a good plan, getting the ball out quickly and knowing your reads. Finding those guys open and having receivers that run great routes and get open all ties in together to get the ball out quickly."

#### On the communication with C Corey Linsley:

"He did an incredible job. We got up to the ball quickly, got the mic ID. We worked silent cadence. We were able to go on our own cadence when we were under center. We didn't have any issues and that's just a good week of preparation and another thing we have to touch on this week."

# On T Rashawn Slater:

"He did an incredible job for not having played football in almost two years. It's really impressive. What he was able to do against one of the best defensive ends in the world, I think he played really impressive."

#### On starting the season 1-0:

"It's a great start. What we have to do now is turn our focus to the Cowboys. We have to do everything we can to give ourselves a shot on Sunday. You can't look ahead; you can't look to far down on the season. It's all about this week."

# On Cowboys QB Dak Prescott's football intelligence:

"I think he's really smart. He's able to make all the places athletic. His arm strength is off the charts. He's got all the tools and weapons, especially when you put him with some pretty good running backs and some receivers. He's going to be able to do some impressive things."

# On wearing a playbook wristband:

"That's a backup plan. There were some play calls that got up to be 17-18 words long. If you're in the huddle and it's loud and you can't hear the play, that's the backup plan you can go to. I think I went to it once or twice, but we only had 15-20 plays on it."

# On communication at the line of scrimmage:

"We practiced silent all week. I felt like we had a pretty good beat on it, going into the game. Before going into the game, we expected to have to go in silent. All the guys worked together really well, and it went well."

# On pocket protection:

"That's one of the things that you have to do against teams that have such a great front seven. You have to get the ball out quickly. As soon as you get the ball out quickly, some of those rush guys have to loosen up a bit. They know you're getting the ball out quickly, they have to play differently. As soon as you get that to happen, you can start nudging them, getting running backs on them, and tight ends on them. That was a big part of our game plan."

#### On giving Head Coach Brandon Staley the game ball after the game:

"It was really cool. That was one of the game balls I took that the ref ended up telling me to keep off the field. I put it in my locker. He was giving them out, I thought it was a good idea to go get that one and give it to him. The first one is always special. I was really happy for him."

#### On the anticipated environment at SoFi Stadium against the Cowboys:

"A lot of excitement. It's been a lot of fun being able to play at that place. Last year was awesome, but to not have fans and go through that was a little weird. [Fans are] some of the aspects that you miss about football. Having fans there this Sunday will be a cool experience."

#### On facing different defensive coverages:

"Anytime you disguise your looks and make the offense think the coverage is something else — be able to bring pressure, drop guys out from other places — I think that's always a challenge. Teams that disguise well are normally pretty good teams. When they're well-coached and they make their looks look like certain other looks, I think that's really tough."

#### On Oregon's win over Ohio State on Saturday:

"Awesome win by the Ducks. I was super proud of those guys and being able to watch that game. I only got to see the first three quarters because we ended up getting on the plane, but I'm super proud of them and how they fought. It's not easy going on the road, especially in Columbus [Ohio]. It was a big win for them."

# On whom from Oregon he contacted, post-win:

"I texted a couple of the guys. Unfortunately, [Oregon TE] Cam McCormick, who was one of the guys who got hurt, has had a tough go in college. I know he's going to fight through this, and he'll be back."

#### On catching up with his family in-person after the game on Sunday:

"I just said hi to them and thanked them for coming. I didn't get to talk to them too much."

# On when he'll give people his brisket recipe:

"Never."

# On Oregon DE Kayvon Thibodeaux:

"My first impression was actually when we were lifting partners in the weight room. His freshman year, we were paired up together. He came in at maybe 17-18 years old. I was 20-21. He was able to outlift me by a couple hundred pounds. I knew then that he was going to be a special player."

# On the impact of Oregon's win over Ohio State:

"I think it's huge. You look back to some of the Rose Bowls that they ended up playing in, some of those close games that Oregon just couldn't get over. For them to go on the road to Columbus [Ohio], to the Horseshoe, and be able to pull a win like that sets them up going forward."

#### On winning road games:

"I think going on the road and having our road record be better than it was last year. Being a road team that's able to go and put up a good fight. Being able to take a win like that on Sunday, especially on the road, is definitely tough for us."

# On the approaching the one-year anniversary of his first NFL game:

"I haven't spent too much time looking back on that. I think we're always looking forward. We have a great opportunity against the Cowboys on Sunday and we're doing everything we can to prepare to give ourselves a shot on Sunday."

# LINEBACKER KYZIR WHITE

#### On his forced fumble:

"On that play, I know we just had a turnover. The emphasis on the sideline was try to get the ball back. [CB] Asante Samuel came up and pretty much forced them in. I just tried to make a good play on the back."

#### On what led to the defense's performance on Sunday:

"It was a great scheme. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley, he puts us in a good position to be successful. It's just game one, we still have some things to clean up, but overall, I feel like we will get a lot better as we keep going on."

#### On Cowboys RB Ezekiel Elliott:

"Ezekiel Elliott is one of the best running backs in the game. He runs hard. He usually always gets positive yards on contact, so we have to wrap up, run our feet, and all rally to the ball."

# On Cowboys QB Dak Prescott:

"I feel like he can make every throw. He's mobile and he's really smart."

#### On his approach to the rest of the season within the linebacker group:

"My approach is just to keep doing what I have been doing, keep getting better. Me and [LB] Drue [Tranquill], we feed off of each other a lot. We help each other all the time. I just want to keep getting better, one percent each day, keep being my biggest critic, keep trying to make plays to help this team win."

#### On the Cowboys passing game:

"I feel like that will provide more opportunities for us to make interceptions and more plays on the ball, if they want to throw it that much. I am excited for the challenge and I am looking forward to it."

#### On how Chargers run defense against Washington:

"We gave up that one big run for like 27 yards I think, but besides that, I feel like we were pretty decent. Of course, we have to keep getting better and keep stopping the run. There are always things you can work on. Besides that one run, I feel like we were pretty decent all day."

# On the impact DL Linval Joseph has on the linebacker group:

"He makes it way easier. He clogs the middle up and makes it easy for you. He takes on double teams. He's a beast in the middle, I can't thank him enough. He makes our job way easier."