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Chargers Media Availability

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HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On 'how close yesterday was to a complete game':

"It was a good performance. It was a performance that, I think, was reflected in the way that we prepared. I felt like all three phases had really big contributions to the win. I felt like that was a good thing. I felt like a lot of the things that we discussed, in terms of what it was going to take to win that game, we got accomplished. Then, watching it again this morning, late last night and this morning, there's a lot that we need to improve on. We have to get right to work here on Las Vegas, but I'm really proud of the way that our guys competed yesterday in the game. I really felt like we took that stadium and played with the type of energy and the type of focus that that game required. I'm really proud of those guys."

On DL Christian Covington's performance yesterday:

"Cov's been a consistent performer for us the entire season. I really feel like this guy is tough, he's rugged. I'm really glad that we signed him. He's been a tremendous value signing for us. I think that he has flexibility within our front to play in a lot of different positions. He's been available. He's been very dependable, both from an availability standpoint and a productivity standpoint. I'm really proud to coach that guy. He's been a very good addition for us."

On the Chargers fans yesterday:

"When it feels like that big-time home environment and you can see our colors in that stadium, I really felt like in the Kansas City game that that place was alive — the Kansas City game, that's primetime, you're the only game in the NFL so that's one thing, but then to have a 1 [p.m.] kick against a division rival, I just feel like we're building. I'm really appreciative to all of our fans. I know that the more that they watch us, the more they will continue to support us."

On 'what has amazed him' about QB Justin Herbert:

"Fridays at 3 [p.m.], when the rest of our facility is empty, he and me are the last ones here. I think that that never ceases to amaze me. That peace and quiet, that serenity in a pro building, where you're kind of at the end of the week, your starting quarterback is still here. That never ceases to amaze me, but it does in the same way. It's a reminder of why he's earning all of the things that he's earning."

On what 'Fridays at 3 o'clock' normally entails:

"I normally head into the quarterback room before I leave, knowing that he's there, just to connect before the weekend, the calm before the storm. When you're towards the end of the week, you're trying to get into that space of how it's all of this preparation, and now you're getting into the space of how it's time to go perform. It's one of those spaces during the week that I've enjoyed. At the same time, it's one of those reminders of what makes him really special."

On details of his Friday afternoon conversations with Herbert:

"Just talking all things; big, small and in the middle."

On how inclement weather last week impacted outdoor practices and the week of preparation:

“I think what that does is it focuses you. It has a way of sharpening your focus and, I think, intensifying your focus, using it as an opportunity and not as an obstacle. We know that we’re going to have to play in weather, at some point, somewhere. Whether it is now or someplace down the road, we’re going to have to play in it and we’re going to have to perform well in it. Last week, I just felt like, when I was talking about our preparation, I think that was an element that made me feel confident that we were going to play a good game because I know how we performed. This team has really been consistent with our process. Certainly, the preparation was a big reason why we played well yesterday.”

On C Corey Linsley’s injury status and the performance of the offensive line yesterday:

“Corey is trending positive. I think it was just more of a game isolation incident. He’s kind of day-to-day. I saw him this morning, but I think we’ll have a lot better sense of how he’s feeling before Wednesday, before we actually go out there and practice, but he seems to be fine, it’s not going to be something that’s going to prevent him from practicing, I don’t think, on Wednesday. I’m really proud of [C/G] Scott [Quessenberry] coming in there. He’s a pro. He and Justin [Herbert] have a very good rapport. I think that [T] Trey [Pipkins III] has shown — he came in in the Kansas City game on that left side, and now he’s able to go to the right side. That’s what you’re looking for with your third and fourth tackles; you’re looking for swing flexibility. We feel like Trey can play in a lot of different places for us. He was able to go in there and compete and do a good job and. Commending him, he didn’t practice during the week because of the COVID[-19], so really commend him that way. I think [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach] Frank Smith and [Assistant Offensive Line Coach] Shaun Sarrett have done an outstanding job with that group, creating a culture of trust and togetherness. I just saw [G] Oday Aboushi down there with Corey and [T] Bryan Bulaga. That group, they’ve really come together and really supported some of the young guys, [G/T] Brendan [Jaimes] and [T] Rashawn [Slater], and certainly [T] Storm [Norton] and Trey, and onboarding [G] Matt [Feiler] in free agency. I feel like that group has really come together. It was a big mission statement of ours last offseason to make the offensive line of strength of our football team. I think that was reflected yesterday in how we played because it’s a really quality defense. I know that they had a lot of guys out, but that’s still as good of a defense we’re going to play against. I was proud of the way that we produced in the run and the passing game. Then, what that allowed us to do was stay turnover-free. When you’re turnover-free in a game, it’s generally a good reflection of how your front played.”

On the run game developing for the offense:

“I think in the discovery process, you’re always trying to figure out the schemes that suit your players best. I think, in the run game, specifically, there were a lot of things that changed from training camp to sort of that middle part of the season, post-bye [week], because you go into it and Bryan [Bulaga] is a big part of your plan. Then, all of a sudden, in that first game, he goes out. Then, you’re factoring in who your tight ends are, your fullbacks; what are their strengths? [TE] Tre’ McKitty wasn’t playing for us at that time. Then, we lose Oday [Aboushi] in the fifth game. We had transition on the right side of our line, onboarding Storm [Norton], onboarding [G/T Michael] Schofield [III]. Then, we also had transition at tight end. I think that when we had that continuity of knowing who our guys were, then we were able to dive into what schemes are going to fit our players best and really tailor it to the strengths of the people blocking and our runners. I feel like we have been able to establish some continuity here in the second half of the season. I think that you’ve seen that in how we’ve run the football the last, I would say, three or four games, for sure. I think that that’s been a strength of ours and it makes us a much more difficult offense to defend.”

On if T Storm Norton will return to RT this week:

“The plan will be, depending on how Storm is feeling, certainly, because he’s still in that process of recovery — like I said, we’re going to make sure that we monitor that closely — but yes, he’s our starter at right tackle. Then, certainly, we have Trey [Pipkins III] as a healthy option, as well.”

On ‘any anticipation’ that TE Jared Cook and LB Kenneth Murray Jr. could be activated off of Reserve/COVID-19 this week:

“Kenny Murray was cleared, I think, today, so I think that you should see him out there on the practice field. I think Jared should be clearing mid-week, at some point, maybe Wednesday or Thursday. I think that’s kind of when he comes off. I will keep you posted on that. All of these things are day-to-day, but at the beginning part of the work week, I think that he should be out there.”

On if any players were placed on Reserve/COVID-19 today:

“Not that I’m aware of.”

On LB Drue Tranquill’s injury status:

“Day-to-day. I think that he’s trending better than he was last week, but day-to-day. We’ll have a much stronger sense on Wednesday. I know that he was out there this morning working out, as well, but I think that we will have a much stronger sense on Wednesday.”

On the offensive line’s ability to adapt since Week 12:

“I’m not, maybe, totally sure of what you’re asking, but what we’ve been able to do, I think, is create depth behind our first five and know what moves we want to make, depending on what guy would go out. That’s been tested because of Rashawn [Slater] missing the Kansas City game, Storm [Norton] missing a game, and then with what’s happened inside with Corey [Linsley] at center for the Houston game. I feel like we’ve had a better sense of how to truly rotate that group and the development of that group. Where Trey Pipkins was at the beginning of the season, like sort of at the bye, and where he is now are two totally different spaces. Same thing with Brendan Jaimes. I think the guys have improved, they’ve developed and that we have a much stronger sense of their role, just a lot firmer understanding of how we want to play. Like I said, I think Frank [Smith] and Shaun [Sarrett] have done a really good job of managing that group, developing that group. Then, [Offensive Coordinator Joe [Lombardi] calling the game for the strengths of that group. I don’t think that you can minimize that, making sure that you call the game so that your guys can be successful. Just proud of our offensive football team. I think they’ve really done a nice job this year.”

On this week’s game being flexed into *Sunday Night Football*:

“There’s a lot at stake in this game. The fact that it’s a division game, I think amplifies the matchup just because of the familiarity and the history between the two teams. It’s going to be an outstanding game. They’re playing at a really, really high level. The first game was a heck of a football game. They’ve had a really, really good season. They’ve really grown and developed as a football team. That game seems so long ago, but they’ve been a really resilient team. I think they’re playing really well right now. This is going to be an outstanding football game for the NFL.”

On Sunday’s game ‘being a win-and-in’ scenario for a playoff berth:

“It’s like a playoff game, I guess because the winner is in and the loser is not so. I think it’s kind of like a playoff game before the playoffs start, so you get that type of consequence, I guess, for the results of the game. These matchups down the stretch are all like this. The fact that it’s a division team, a team that we’re more familiar with, I think that amplifies the matchup. There are going to be a lot of really good players in this game, a lot of really good players, and that’s why it’s going to be great for the NFL to see two really good teams go at it.”

On his approach to this week:

“I’ve been in a lot of games like this in my lifetime, not in the NFL as a head coach, but I think that any time you’re in a matchup like this where there’s a lot at stake, it goes down to your preparation and you trusting in your game and treating that week like has a life of its own. You have to pour into this week, have to pour into your team and make sure that you have the level of focus, the level of detail, that the week requires. I think that’s what we’re trying to do; establish that consistency and performance during the week. I like the way that we’ve kind of gotten off to that start as a team, with me in my first year. I think we’re always improving. We’re going to need to this week. We need to be better this week than we were last week, for sure, because this game is for a playoff spot.”

On 'what he has noticed about the team during the process of developing a culture:

“When you hear your players start to sound like coaches, I think that you feel like you’re a lot closer to establishing your way of doing things, when your players sound like coaches with the way you practice; whether it’s techniques, schemes, situation — when they start to sound like you do, I think that you know you have a good thing going. I think what we’ve been able to do is establish an identity in all three phases and establish a connected team that knows one another well. That was important to me, to make sure that our team was connected. You would be surprised how challenging that can be. A team that was resilient, a team that could respond because the NFL is so dynamic and there are going to be things that happen during the course of the year that really should test you, that challenge you, and I think that our guys have responded all season long. I think that that’s normally a good sign that you have a good thing going when you know you have encountered some disappointment, failure, some losses, whatever the case may be, that you bounce back and that you stay connected. I think we’ve done that all season long. I’m just really proud of this group, being able to join up with them. Certainly, my first season as a head coach, it’s been a pleasure to coach this group and to join up with them. I’m so thankful that they’ve embraced me and our staff. I’ve enjoyed coming to work with these guys every single day, to compete next to them every single day. Our best is to come.”

On RB Austin Ekeler:

“When I first got here, I had an initial phone conversation with him, I think it was right when I got hired. If you guys know Austin, he’s the same guy on that phone that he is with you guys in-person, and the same way that he is with me on the practice field every single day. Then, when I finally joined up with him in-person, actually in this office, it was the first time that we met in-person, I felt like we were going to be an instant match. I felt like we had a vision for him and the role that he was going to play for our football team, not only just as a player, but as a leader. He’s been a pleasure to coach. I’ve enjoyed seeing him take that lead role. I’ve enjoyed seeing him having a career season. You guys are aware of the touchdown, the rushing yards, the receiving yards, but his example has been very important for our entire team. Just really proud of his season. Again, I think the best is to come for him.”

On the value of personal relationships with the players:

“I don’t think that you can take it as far as you can take it, as a competitor, if you don’t know who you’re doing this with and why you’re doing it. I think that everybody’s different. I think that you have to start with that promise that every player that you’re coaching, every coach that you’re coaching with, is different than you are. You have to be able to tap into those differences and those personal things that make all of us go. That requires a lot of listening. It requires consistency of communication, where you’re always updating and uploading a lot of new information, whether it’s the birth of a child or something back home, just there are all these little things that make a big difference in someone’s day-to-day life. I just don’t think that you can coach a guy and compete with a guy to your full potential if you don’t know one another because, ultimately, you will not have that deep level of trust and respect that you need when it’s tight, when it’s tough. I think that that’s why, more than anything, relationships matter. I think that when you do things together, you can bring out the best in one another. That’s what I think is really important in sports and competition; you can’t improve by yourself, you can’t improve alone, you have to be able to be willing to meet people and really go the whole way with people in order to truly become your best. I spend a great deal of time thinking about those types of things because that is, ultimately, I think, what stands the test of time.”

On the performance of LBs Nick Niemann and Amen Ogbongbemiga yesterday:

“I think both of those guys gave us a real chance in the game. I thought that they saw the game, they were lined up assignment-sound, for the most part. I thought that they tackled well. They’ve really improved this season. I think [Linebackers Coach] Mike Wilhoite has really done a nice job of bringing those guys along. They’ve also been very key contributors on special teams, as you’re aware of. They had linebacker jobs yesterday, but they also had special teams jobs yesterday, so handling that workload, I thought that they managed it well. I thought that [LB] Kyzir [White] did a nice job of keeping them calm and composed, and [S] Derwin [James Jr.] kept them calm and composed. Certainly, it was one of our better defensive performances yesterday, and those guys were very solid for us.”

On 'if there has been a fluctuation in the offensive run game from an efficiency standpoint':

"I feel like in the second half of the season that we've really run the football at a high level. I feel like, like I said, establishing that consistency and the continuity of who's blocking for us, and then establishing who's running for us, as well, I think that that's really been a big storyline. For us, we truly have the threat of running the football now, where you can't just say, 'Hey, this team has people out there that would suggest that they're going to run it, and then they're going to throw away.' I think what we wanted to be able to do is not have to live in that high-volume-throw world all of the time. Justin [Herbert] is one of the few guys, if you do have high-volume, that he can take care of the football. When you get high-volume throwing numbers, there's more risk in what's going on. We wanted to make sure that we were able to dictate the pace of the game. Again, a lot of it is the way people are playing you, as well, and taking advantage of how they're playing you. We just wanted to create that type of balance, not balanced in terms of 50/50, but balanced that, 'Hey, if you're going to play us a certain way, if you're going to assess us a certain way, this is how we're going to play against you.' I feel like what we've been able to do is really solidify who we are in the run game. I think that we've done a really nice job with our design. I really think that yesterday was a good example, like it was a bloody day, but any time that you have 35 rushes in a game and over 20-something completions — I think we had 22 completions yesterday — I think that you're going to struggle to find a loss when that's the case. That's a formula that I think has stood the test of time and that I think is relevant. In the Kansas City game, we had something similar. Again, it was a high output day for us, offensively. I think that's a strength of ours right now, being able to play that way. If people are going to play us that way they're going to play us four down [linemen], nickel [personnel], everything, then we have a plan of attack."

On T Trey Pipkins III's development:

"A lot of it is his mindset. Then, the second thing is his technique, understanding how we want to do things around here, then us also understanding him and being able to tailor our teaching, our coaching, to his game. At the beginning of season, he didn't play well enough to earn an opportunity. That's just the truth of it; he wasn't performing well enough. That's why he wasn't playing. What he did, I think that he really started to understand the importance of how hard you have to prepare and how much you need to improve as a player in this league to become a player in this league. I know that Frank [Smith] and Shaun [Sarrett] have done a great job with him. I think him being in an O-line room with some veteran players like Matt [Feiler], like Corey [Linsley], like Oday [Aboushi], like Bryan [Bulaga] that know what it takes. It's such a toughness position, a culture position. It's a developmental position. It happens for people at different stages, but he's shown some progress, and now he needs to continue to improve and stay consistent in his performance, but I'm proud of the way that he's been able to fill in at both spots. I think that that's going to be the type of player that he needs to be, moving forward, as a guy that can play in a lot of different spots. I'm really proud of him hanging in there and being resilient."

On TE Tre' McKitty's development:

"When you go out to a pro game, you need to go out there with guys that look like they belong out there; this guy looks like how a pro tight end out to look at the point of attack. He's six-foot-four-and-a-half. He's 255 [pounds]. That's who we want to be joining up with because this guy has got a block [Bears OLB] Khalil Mack, he has to block [Rams OLB] Von Miller, he has to block [OLB] Joey Bosa, he has to block [Chiefs DE] Frank Clark, [Raiders DE] Maxx Crosby, [Raiders DE] Yannick Ngakoue, that's who is at the point of attack — [Steelers LB] T.J. Watt, [Browns DE] Myles Garrett, [49ers DE] Nick Bosa — you want me to keep going? These guys that those tight ends have to block are really, really good. In order to block them, you have to do it with people that are capable of blocking them. Tre' has proven to us that he can block at the point of attack. Now, the thing that he also can do is this guy can catch the football. He's got good hands, he's got good run after the catch. He's going to get going as a pass-catcher. Right now, his primary role is like what you mentioned. Since we onboarded this guy after the bye, we've been a different offense. We've been able to run the ball at a lot higher level. He's coming into his own. I really liked coaching the guy. We're going to need him to play really well this week because, obviously, Vegas, one of the strengths of their team, if not the biggest strength is Yannick [Ngakoue] and Maxx [Crosby] coming off of the edge."

On running the ball offensively out of a condensed tight end formational setup:

“It forces edge players to play you straight up. The more you spread it out, the more the advantage goes to the defense. You have to force these guys to play to be complete players. When there’s more traffic around these guys, they’re not going to play this thing. You have to have them, ‘Is this a run? Is it a pass? What type of pass? Is this a keeper? Am I getting shifted, nudged, cracked?’ The more condensed the formation, the more traffic you put around the edge, the more that those guys have to negotiate and play you straight-up.”

On ‘the biggest change’ in the Raiders’ offense since the Week 4 matchup:

“I think the way they’re running the football with [Raiders RB] Josh [Jacobs]. Going into the first game, Josh was just coming back for that game. This guy’s one of the quality backs in the league. This guy breaks a lot of tackles. He’s an outstanding pass receiver out of the backfield. I just think that them being able to run the football better, they made a couple of changes with their O-line since our game, moving some people around. I think finding that consistency with their personnel and what fits them best. They’re one of the top passing offenses in the league and that has stayed the same the entire year. [Raiders QB] Derek [Carr] is having a really good season. They have a lot of good receivers, a lot of good tight ends, they know how to utilize them. A very, very dangerous team, a team that can score quickly. Again, a very, very prolific offense.”

On if there are any ‘major differences in the two coaching styles of how the offense is being operated’ by the Raiders:

“Maybe a little bit. I would say that it’s subtle. More than anything, they’ve onboarded [Raiders QB] Marcus [Mariota] in some packages. They’re kind of onboarded him in some special types of situations. I think they’re trying to maximize a lot of their players and maybe play with a little bit more creativity, a little bit more variety, with some of those guys, and, I think, keep the defense on its toes. I think that there has been that element. I think [Raiders Interim Head Coach/Special Teams Coordinator] Rich [Bisaccia] is doing an incredible job this season. I think what they’re showing is that they’re a complete team. They’re a team that has played really quality defense. They have a quality offense. They have outstanding specialists. Rich [Bisaccia] has done a really nice job with that team.”

SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.

On the 'win and in' playoff scenario this week:

"It's like the playoffs are starting this week already. You win; you keep advancing. That's how the playoffs work. We have a great opportunity coming this week in Week 18 against the Raiders."

On takeaways from the Week 4 matchup against the Raiders earlier this season:

"We came out, on defense, and was communicating. We were getting off of the field, we got off of the field early. Our offense went out the field and scored like every time. We got out to a lead."

On if yesterday's game 'felt like a playoff setting':

"It definitely felt like a playoff game out there. There was a lot of energy out there. To see every phase coming together, everybody celebrating together, seeing [QB Justin] Herbert tackle [WR] Mike Williams, the defense was celebrating. We were all celebrating together; [OLB Joey] Bosa was pumping his chest. Then, just seeing our special teams, with [WR] Andre [Roberts] run one into the end zone, seeing all three phases connected, I feel like that's the type of football that everybody has been waiting for."

On Roberts' impact on the team as a whole, primarily contributing in the field position aspect:

"He gives us a big lift. Our special teams needed work from the beginning of the year and he's brought us a long way. His vision, his speed and his ability to make plays, I feel like that's what separates him from some of the returners in this league."

On 'being close' to interceptions yesterday:

"I have to make those plays. I kind of lost the ball at the last second — I don't like to make excuses, but I kind of lost the ball. I didn't look it all of the way in. I was too excited. I took my eyes off it. It's just the small things. You take it for granted, but it's simply looking the ball in. I have to finish those plays because those are the types of plays that I can make and I know that I can make them. I'll just get better from it."

On the team's mindset when a different opposing quarterback enters the game:

"Our mindset is to definitely get after the quarterback, but you have to be aware of what type of quarterback you're playing, whether they're mobile or if it's a guy that can't move as much. Knowing the quarterback is key, knowing who is in the game at all times. It kind of changes how you want to rush up front sometimes; you can't just run up the field if you're playing a guy that can run. You have to always be aware of that."

On QB Justin Herbert tackling WR Mike Williams after their touchdown:

"It was amazing. I don't like the guys tackling each other out there, but it was amazing seeing their celebration and the team's camaraderie together, everybody bonding for that special moment. That just shows you how humble he is; for him to break a record and go tackle Mike Williams tells you what type of guy he is, especially when he's the one breaking the record. We love Herbert and we're so happy that he's our quarterback."

On Herbert at practice:

"Justin Herbert is a superstar, but if you were to just be around him, he's so humble. He doesn't like the spotlight. He doesn't like it about him. You have nothing but respect for a guy like that. He works hard. He's a great teammate."

On keys to preparing for the Raiders:

"We have to know where [Raiders WR Hunter] Renfrow is. He's a guy that gets open a lot. [Raiders QB] Derek Carr, it starts with him, so we have to be able to put pressure on him. We have to be ready for everything, whatever they present."

On playing on *Sunday Night Football* for the second time this season:

"We're definitely built for this moment. I definitely feel like that is going to help us. We can, too much, think about what we did in the past because we know that the Raiders are coming and fighting for a playoff spot, too. We have to bring our 'A' game. We already know what type of game that it's going to be. Nothing that we did in the beginning of the year matters anymore. All that matters, come Sunday night, is that if you win, you keep going."

WIDE RECEIVER MIKE WILLIAMS

On QB Justin Herbert tackling him after his touchdown reception yesterday:

“I don’t know what he was trying to do, but he tackled me on that one. I don’t know if he was trying to give me a big hug — he likes hugging people. He kind of brought me down. I thought we were about to make a pile — I was afraid of that. It didn’t go that far, but there was just a lot of energy and emotion in that.”

On what Herbert was saying to him:

“I don’t know, I can’t remember. He probably was just screaming or something. I can’t really remember. That’s just the type of energy that he brings.”

On Herbert setting the franchise’s single-season touchdown record on that score:

“That was huge. I didn’t even notice it. I almost threw the ball in the stands and all that. They told me that it didn’t go in the stands, though. They said that they got it back, I don’t know. I don’t even know where the ball went; I kind of just flung it. I don’t know where it went. That was big. That was huge for him, as a goal. I think that he passed up [former Chargers QB] Philip [Rivers], which was huge. Everybody knew what type of quarterback Phil was for this organization, so that’s big for Justin.”

On setting career-best receiving marks this season:

“I feel like any time you can contribute to the team and help the team win is big. I feel like every year it’s a goal of mine to get 1,000 yards and 10 touchdowns. Have a little bit more to go on the touchdowns side, but I think that it’s huge when you can have two guys get over 1,000 yards. Having a guy like [WR] Keenan [Allen] in the room who can get a lot of touches, he is going to have 100 catches every year, so you kind of have to get yours where you fit in and keep making plays.”

On playing the Raiders at Allegiant Stadium last season:

“There weren’t any fans, so, obviously, it’s going to be a little different this year. We’re looking forward to it. It’s going to be fun. The Raiders, they have a big fan base, so we look forward to going out there and playing with a lot of energy, playing off of the crowd and having fun.”

On former teammates and current Raiders CB Casey Hayward Jr. and LB Denzel Perryman:

“That’s going to be fun. We were talking to those guys last time. They were kind of salty about the last game, so we have to prepare this week and try to get a win.”

On if the players who missed Week 15 ‘had any extra motivation’ yesterday:

“Yes, for sure. We felt like that was a game that we should have won. We kind of put ourselves in a bad situation with losing to Houston, so now we have to get this last one against the Raiders to keep this thing going.”

On the ‘win and in’ playoff scenario heading into this week:

“I feel like we were going to be excited regardless. We all know the situation we’re in and what’s at stake. Regardless if it was Sunday night, Sunday at 1 [p.m.], or whatever time we were going to play, I felt like we all knew what was at stake and that we needed to get this game to keep this game going. We’re all looking forward to coming out on Sunday night and balling.”

On the gameplan for this week:

“Do what we do; that’s the main thing. We’re going to try and come out, make plays for the offense, have fun and get a win. Come out this week, have great practices and make plays.”