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Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

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HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On today's joint practice with the Cowboys:

"I said it yesterday, but I really take my hat off to the Cowboys. I thought these last two days of work were just incredible for both teams. I think the quality of coaching, the quality of play just made both teams better. I just really appreciate [Cowboys Head Coach] Mike [McCarthy] and the Jones family and all of the players for Dallas. Just a lot of respect for them. I thought it was two great days of work. I know that we really improved as a football team."

On his evaluation of yesterday's film of the offense:

"It's a competitive group over there for Dallas. They have a lot of really good rushers, a lot of good rushers. The style of play is very different than what they see from us every day, in terms of the quickness, and there's a lot of smaller guys that are really, really twitchy, really athletic. There are a lot of new rush packages that you're having to figure it out on the fly. I think it was good for our team to have to block a different style because there are a lot of teams in the NFL that play that style. In the first day, offensively, on both sides of the ball, they have to get used to a new style because the way we play on defense is completely different than their group. I think that was just the thing, our O-line getting used to the style of play, but I thought our receivers really played at a high level yesterday. I thought that [WRs] Keenan [Allen], Mike [Williams] and Josh [Palmer], the separation was impressive, [QB] Justin [Herbert] was very accurate. But it was really good for us to see a different style of play, and then the quality of their players; [Cowboys LB] Micah Parsons, [Cowboys DE] DeMarcus Lawrence, [Cowboys CB] Trevon Diggs, that's a really good group of guys that you're going to be playing against. Then, [Cowboys Defensive Coordinator] Dan Quinn does an outstanding job coaching that group. It was really good for us to play against that."

On the performance of Ts Trey Pipkins III and Storm Norton yesterday:

"Those guys, when you're going against DeMarcus Lawrence, who I think is as good of a rusher — you know me; Khalil [Mack], [Bills OLB] Von [Miller], Joey [Bosa], all of these guys — We watch Tank. DeMarcus and Micah [Parsons] are really a tough group to block, just on the edge. Then, Micah can be in a lot of different locations; he can be an edge rusher, he can be a behind-the-ball linebacker. Then inside, they have a lot of really athletic inside players. Then, really, defensive ends that they move inside in known-pass. That was really good for our group to see. Our guys did a much better job as you go. I know, today, I got good feedback of the improvement that you have to make, and that's part of it. The one thing that I liked was our group getting better as the scrimmage goes on. I get used to this style, we get used to this look. We're figuring this look out, and that's what you're trying to do in these two practices is make improvements like that."

On the competition at right tackle:

“My evaluation is that they are both much better football players than they were last season. That is a fact. Then, where that lies, in terms of the order, we’re not there yet to make a decision. They’re going to play in this football game and we’re going to continue to evaluate it until we feel like we’re ready. But I will tell you that both of them are improved football players. I’m really proud of the way they’ve improved.”

On any players that will not play on Saturday against the Cowboys that did play last week against the Rams:

“We got to get through this tape tonight. We’re going to meet on it tomorrow, on the off day, and you guys should know pre-game though, based on who’s out there early. You guys will know that based on who’s working out. You will have your answer pre-game.”

On his evaluation of the defense’s performance:

“I thought a group that played together. I felt the communication. [S] Derwin [James Jr.] wasn’t out there, and looking for commanders out there. I think [OLB] Kyle Van Noy really helps with that. I saw a front that is playing together. That’s a good football team over there running the ball. They’ve always been a top rushing team with Zeke [Cowboys RB Ezekiel Elliott] and [Cowboys RB Tony] Pollard, but [Cowboys G] Zack Martin, [Cowboys T] Tyron Smith — two of the best players of a decade. [Cowboys TE] Dalton Schultz, a very quality tight end. Mike McCarthy has always had a great running football team. When he was in Green Bay, they were outstanding. Those O-lines that they had in Green Bay were amazing. I feel like we were able to stand up to a good running attack and two premier backs in the league. I liked the way we played together. I thought we played with a lot of energy. I thought that we kept the ball out of the deep part of the field. I thought that we got some negative plays. There’s a lot to clean up. Yesterday, much like our offense, you’re facing some new things, and you’re not executing at a perfect level, but you’re learning a lot of good lessons. I thought that our defense definitely moved forward this week, for sure.”

On where he has observed ‘the most progress’ out of QB Justin Herbert:

“Just confidence in his fundamentals. I think when you see him, regardless of the situation, regardless of the play call, I think that he’s really confident in his fundamentals, of his feet and his eyes working together. I think what you’re seeing is just that pinpoint accuracy that he has. I know, defensively, going against it, there’s just not a lot of margin for error, and because there’s not a lot of margin for error because his timing and rhythm is really good. He’s still working hard at it. There’s still a bunch to improve on. I think his fundamentals, as a quarterback, are improving.”

On the ‘tone set’ by Herbert ‘staying after practice for an hour to throw extra’:

“It sets the tone because he has rare competitive stamina. It tells the organization that we better keep up with him, and that’s a good thing. The thing about Justin, too, is that he doesn’t have to talk about how hard he works, he just shows you how hard he works. That’s the best type of leadership, it’s when you just show people how you do things. He never feels like he has it figured out. There’s always something he can do better. I think he has that humility in his game that he knows that, ‘I have to improve on a lot every day.’ He sets a good example for us all.”

On the depth at running back:

“Good to see them having to navigate different traffic. A different style of play. You get to see them in protection against different linebackers. Run a route against different linebackers or safeties. I think this group is a very competitive situation. We’re looking forward to giving them a big audition on Saturday night.”

On if RB Isaiah Spiller ‘will get some early carries on Saturday night’:

“They all will. You’ll see [RBs] Joshua [Kelley], Larry [Rountree III] and Isaiah [Spiller] in the first half, for sure. Then, you’ll see Leddie [Brown] and Kevin [Marks Jr.] in the second half.”

On ‘outlining a vision’ for the run defense in the offseason and ‘how close the defense is to that vision’:

“Closer. Not there yet. Have to get Derwin [James Jr.] out there. That’ll look different when he’s out there, for sure. The types of players that are out there, and the types of fundamentals, most importantly, are more what we’re used to seeing, and what we expect to see. Today was a good measuring stick, these last two days were good measuring sticks, against a really quality running football team, two really quality backs. It takes all 11 guys to play good run defense, you guys have heard me say it. In the first game against the Rams the other night, [CB] Michael Davis on a crack-replace, that’s run defense. It’s not just the interior players that you guys know about, it’s everybody that’s improving. It’s been a point of emphasis, for sure. Definitely was a weakness — the weakness — of us last year, and we’re working hard to improve it.”

On an injury update for DB Ja’Sir Taylor:

“He had a little soft-tissue. He’s been going at it big time, and doing really well. We just wanted to make sure that he had a chance to play in the game. He’s been doing really well. He might play in the game. To have a chance to play the game, we just wanted to rest him today. You’ll probably know that pre-game, whether or not he is out there or not.”

On if reps against the Cowboys in joint practices ‘were more quality’ than a preseason game:

“Yes, it’s much better quality for a couple of different reasons. You get more plays, and then the types of schemes that you’re playing against, you’re seeing their premium scheme, where, in the preseason, no one is running their premium scheme. It’s a very different defensive and offensive schematic game. These practices are where it’s at. That environment, especially when you’re working with good people in a very controlled environment, a respectful environment, you’re able to measure yourself in a lot better way. Like they may not get into the red zone in a preseason game, they may not get in the red zone. You may not have a two-minute situation that kind of expresses itself, so you’re able to control what happens. Then, there’s ultimately things that happen in a scrimmage, you just kind of work together to make sure it happens. It was great work for us the last couple of days.”

On his level of excitement for the team:

“The way I see it so far is how we played today. That’s all I can go by, is what happened today. That’s all I know how to do as a coach, as a competitor, is to figure it out today. That’s what I was excited about. I thought we came to the field with the right mindset. I thought our offense played better today. I thought our defense played better today. I thought our special teams played better today. That’s what we need to focus on, is today. I think this group of guys that I’m coaching understands that.”

On an injury update for DB Mark Webb Jr.:

“Mark Webb [Jr.] has this calf situation. It’s of soft-tissue nature. We’re just working through that.”

On Dodgers Manager Dave Roberts ‘guaranteeing a World Series win’ and if he will guarantee a Super Bowl victory:

“Dylan [Hernandez]. [*Laughter*] I think every man has to go his own way. You have to make your own mind up about how you’re going to do things. Number one, so much respect for Dave and what he’s built there with the Dodgers. Remarkable. We’re focused on today.”

WIDE RECEIVER KEENAN ALLEN

On joint practices with the Cowboys:

"I thought it went well. Some good things on both sides. Definitely some room for improvement, but I thought we played well."

On 'what the offense identified during practice as areas of improvement':

"Just missing our shots. We left a lot of things out on the field, but it's training camp. We found that, and we'll get it right in the game. Obviously, the protection plan, we weren't game planning for the protection for the things they had up on third downs. They kind of got us on that end, too."

On how valuable joint practices are for veteran players who don't play in preseason games:

"Major. To get a chance to go up against another team, see where you are, see what your conditioning is, see how good your games has been going. Obviously, you play against the same guys every day and then you go play against some other team who hasn't seen what you have done. You get to see what it looks like, so pretty good."

On if it was 'worth it' to practice against the Cowboys:

"Absolutely, always. Any time you get a chance to compete, I love it."

On if he 'got all that he wanted to get out of the joint practices':

"Yeah, I think so. Coming in, competing and going every rep. It was tough, too, because we kind of monitored the practice towards them instead of what we've been doing. So, obviously, we had more reps. We just had to change our mindset."

On 'what he means by the practice changed towards the Cowboys':

"I'm talking about the practice layout. Our practice, we only do four plays per set. We did eight to match them. We did four, two, four, two. Four for the ones and two for twos because they are going to be playing, obviously. More geared towards the ones, so we get our work during the week."

On if he has a sense of the running back competition as a wide receiver:

"Absolutely. Going in there, you have pass protection, you're running routes on the linebackers, you're picking up blitzes. They get a lot of chances to compete and I like what's going on in the running back room. Obviously [RB Austin] Ekeler is going to be number one, and then after that, it's a toss-up."

On how the pass protection disrupted the work for the wide receivers yesterday:

"It's tough. Like I said, in practice, we don't game plan for it, so the MIKE [linebacker] is going to be the guy that's going to move around everywhere, but we're not even trying to find him and stuff like that right now because it's practice. It was tough. They put together a great plan. It's going to be tough to block that guy this year. He's definitely a hell of an athlete."

On if he has noticed anything different about QB Justin Herbert this training camp:

"Just understanding the offense better, feeling more comfortable, understanding what is going on, understanding what we're trying to get to. He's changing up the cadences a little bit, so that's one way to see that he's being more comfortable. Just taking advantage of everything. You see him. He stays like an hour-and-a-half after practice just throwing balls. It's crazy."

On 'how much it takes to get used to changing the cadence':

"As a receiver, it doesn't take too much. We're just looking at the ball, seeing when it's snapped. [Former Chargers QB] Philip [Rivers] did it a lot. He played with the snap count a lot, so we are kind of used to it."

On why he laughed when he said Herbert stays after practice to keep throwing:

"I don't know. Philip never stayed after practice to throw the ball. Philip put in the work, but this guy is out here like an hour-and-a-half after, just throwing the same route over and over and over. If there is not a spiral, he'll just keep throwing the same one."

On what needs to happen now to help the team make the playoffs:

“Stay together, keep learning, keep getting better, take practices like this, go and watch the film, see what we can get better at, small things. Just find ways to keep getting better.”

On if he has noticed WR Joshua Palmer get better at releases:

“A little bit. Just trying to put everything together. I’ve been stealing stuff from guys who played 10 years ago. It’s a mimic league. I say it all the time, we do the same stuff, it’s just about who can keep finding ways to do it better. I try to coach him up on it and let him go from there.”

On ‘how much more polished ‘Palmer is this year than last year:

“A lot more polished. I think his timing is getting better, his patience, and understanding of the progressions in the read. When he’s not the first read, he can take a lot of time doing technique stuff. You can them a little bit more. Like last year, he would be coming out of the route so fast that he’d be right underneath the first progression route. Like, you have way more time than that. So, now he’s starting to understand it.”

On how he wants to see the offense improve in the last week of the preseason:

“Keep pushing the tempo. Getting lined up faster. Understanding the snap count that he keeps trying to work. We jumped offsides a couple of times today, so just keep understanding that, keep working at it and it gives us an advantage.”

On if he has seen QB Justin Herbert throwing sidearm in practice:

“Couldn’t tell you. It might be a question for him. Anytime he throws it, we try to catch it. However he throws it, just throw it.”

On if the skill unit on the team right now ‘is the most experienced group he’s been a part of’:

“Yeah, possibly. Definitely a great group. Like you said, a lot of experience. It could be. We had me, [former Chargers WR] Stevie [Johnson], [former Chargers TE] Antonio [Gates] and [former Chargers WR] Malcom Floyd that one year. That was a good year, too.”

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On joint practice with the Cowboys:

"I thought there were a lot of good things out there. There is plenty of room for improvement for us and we'll have a great chance to watch the film later and evaluate ourselves. But, overall, I thought we competed well and I thought we executed pretty well as well."

On how much the offense has learned from facing the Cowboys in two joint practices:

"We tried to do our best early on of watching preseason games, watching their tape from last year and figuring out a protection plan. I saw some different things out there yesterday, so we were able to go to the meeting rooms and kind of adjust and have a new plan going into today. I thought we answered better. We were more firm up front, so I thought those guys up front did a great job today."

On if it is 'a good process to learn on the fly' in joint practices:

"I'd love to have as much time as possible to watch film and get to know an opponent, but I thought for our scrimmage today, we handled that well. We bounced back, and that's a really good front line that they have up there. To see those guys fly around up close and personal, I think it's a great job for us to be able to learn and grow from that and continue to compete against those guys. So, it's been good for us."

On Cowboys LB Micah Parsons:

"I think he is about as special as it gets. I don't know if I have much to offer him. He is much faster, much stronger than me. I don't have any defensive moves to help him. I was just talking with him in-between play calls and stuff like that. He's a great person. I'm really looking forward to watching him this year."

On the importance of the two joint practices:

"It means everything to us. To have these live reps of treating them like a game-like situation, that's where we get our reps. That's where we get our practice in. Since we're not playing in the preseason, we need to take advantage of these reps, and we did. We felt like we really got after the past couple of days. To go up against a team like that, I think it's a great learning lesson for us, as well, to see a team that flies around like that and a front seven like they have. I thought it was a great opportunity for us."

On why he throws after practice:

"I need to be the best quarterback that I can be. I go after practice, and if I miss any throws that day, it's important to me to figure them out and take care of my body, as well. I'm going to go ice and make sure I'm ready to go tomorrow."

On if there is a specific number of throws he makes after practice:

"I think it's just based on whatever happened that day. If there are a couple of throws during practice that maybe I missed or maybe I felt like I could have done better, after practice is the time to address those. I can get as mad or as happy after practice as I want, but during practice, I need to be level-headed and focused. You can't let the last play affect your next one. So, that's kind of the purpose of that after practice."

On 'if he is mad while throwing after practice':

"No. It's just practice. It's just a chance to go out there. We always have a bunch of receivers that come catch balls. It's great to have those guys because they make me a lot better. It's been fun."

On if he repeats throws after practice because of a 'bad spiral':

"No. It's more so a feel in the pocket. It's being able to step up and deliver a strike. A lot of it is the placement of the ball, where it is. I feel like the spiral has something to do with it, but not entirely. I think it's more important that I get a good feel of climbing up in the pocket, setting up, and giving a good ball to the receiver."

On when he started throwing after practice:

"I think that's just part of playing quarterback. It's kind of just what I grew up doing. I feel like I've taken good care of my arm to the point where I can handle that. As a quarterback, I need to be at my best for these guys. If I let them down during practice, I need to stay out after practice and work and continue to be the best I can be for those guys. It means a lot to have those guys out there catching for me and being around because it's all of us together."

On if he was working on one specific throw after practice:

“There were a few. There were probably five or six. Sometimes one takes longer than the other to get that good feeling that you want at quarterback. But, I thought, overall, it’s a great opportunity for me to go and get better. It doesn’t get much better this, out here in the sun. To have receivers like that and have my coaches behind me, it doesn’t get any better than that.”

On how TE Gerald Everett complements the wide receiver group:

“He’s done a great job so far. He’s able to break man coverage so easily and he’s able to attack leverages. He’s got a good understanding of football and the way that people guard him. To have him step up and learn the offense as quickly as he did, he’s another playmaker, another guy that you can go to on third down to give [WR] Keenan [Allen] or [WR] Mike [Williams] maybe some time off on those third downs. So, it’s huge to have him around.”

On ‘his excitement level of the team through training camp’:

“I’m really excited for this team. I think we are miles ahead of where we were at this point last year. Having been in the same offense, same defense, we’ve added a couple of guys on defense that are going to make a huge impact. It’s been really fun to go up against those guys because they made us a lot better. The whole thing that [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley has been preaching is competition, and we’ve certainly had our fair share of competition. [CB] J.C. Jackson, [OLB] Kyle Van Noy, [OLB] Khalil Mack, those guys stepped in and they have made a huge impact. It’s been really fun to play against those guys.”

On S Derwin James Jr. receiving his contract extension:

“I’m so happy for him. I can’t stop smiling about the whole thing because he is so deserving of it. I’ve only gotten to know him for a few years, but it’s been an absolute honor to be his teammate. He’s deserved every penny of that and to have him, the leader, the competitor, the teammate, the friend, he’s about as good as it gets. To have him, I know the Chargers are better off with him.”

On ‘if he can think of an example of what James Jr. means to the team’:

“I think a good example is the whole contract negotiation part he hadn’t been practicing, but it was like he was. He was taking reps in walkthroughs, he was out there working. We saw that and we knew how much football meant to him, especially this team. For him to have to deal with that — because I know it’s not up to him; if it were up to him, he’d be out there practicing and he’d be doing every rep just like I would be out there. We knew that; we feel that. We know that is Derwin. I was expecting him to practice yesterday. I think Coach Staley kind of held him out, but Derwin is just a competitor and I really respect that about him.”

On how he balances perfectionism and making mistakes:

“It’s an interesting thought because I always tell myself that I made it further than I ever thought I was going to. At this point, if I just do my best, I can’t complain. I go out there and if I work as hard as I can on every single rep and I go out after practice, I can fail and I can still be proud of myself. To have that mindset and knowing that I’m not going to be perfect, I’m going to throw interceptions, I’m going to throw incompletions, unfortunately, but it’s all about bouncing back and doing your best. If I can have that mentality going into each week, I know that I’ll get my best and I’ll give everything that I have for this team.”

On if there are things the team still wants to ‘nail down’ before the regular season:

“Yeah, I think there are slight modifications of the offense that we can figure out. Kind of things that you put in, maybe 202, 303 courses that aren’t as easy as entry-level stuff that we have in our offense. So, continuing to work on our cadence, our pre-snap adjustments, our alignment and everything that we can kind of mix up between different coverages that the defenses are playing. There is plenty of us to kind of work on and it’s especially important in these next couple of weeks.”

On adjusting his cadence:

“I think it is really important for a quarterback because it’s another level of the game that you can kind of take advantage of the defense. Having [C] Corey [Linsley], especially where he’s from and all of the things that they did over there, he’s got a great feel for it. He’s been on me about that and the offensive line, they love that when they get a jump on the defense, or maybe those guys are jumping offsides. Any free play that we can get, I think it’s a huge help for our offense.”

On if he can watch tape on changing cadences or if he listens to Linsley about examples:

"It's probably a little bit of both. I think Corey has got a great feel for that, and so we've picked up a lot of the cadences that they used over in Green Bay. But at the same time, maybe watching the TV copies of the Green Bay games and watching [Packers QB] Aaron Rodgers, seeing all of the different cadences that he has so that we're able to pick up on some of those."

On if the offensive line practicing against OLBs Joey Bosa and Khalil Mack helped them prepare for facing the Cowboys:

"I think the competition against those guys is huge. To have Joey and Khalil on opposite ends, it's great work for our tackles. I think it's great for game-plan strategy, as well, knowing that you're going into a game and having those guys to block. It affects whether you keep the running back and tight ends to chip and get out. For us, we've been able to see a lot of that. I know [T] Trey [Pipkins III], [T] Storm [Norton], [T] Rashawn [Slater], they all appreciate that because those are two of the best in the game. Any chance you get time to go against those guys, I think it's going to be really helpful."

On the competition at right tackle:

"That's probably a question for [Offensive Coordinator] Joe Lombardi or Coach Staley. I've done my best to just be the quarterback that I can be this camp. That's all I focused on. I know that Trey and Storm, they are competing, they are fighting. I respect both of those guys very highly. I think very highly of them as teammates and athletes. It'll be interesting to see."

On the quarterback competition after practice with the Cowboys:

"It was just a little target practice. I think they ended up winning, but it was fun to just see those guys and hang out with them a little bit."

On if he knows Cowboys QB Dak Prescott 'well':

"I've only met him a couple of times, but I really respect him as a player and as a competitor, as well. He's had a whole bunch of success over the past couple of years. I just wished him good luck, stay healthy and get after it this year."

On how RB Isaiah Spiller 'fits' into the offense:

"Hopefully at running back [*laughter*]. He's done a great job so far. He's been able to pick up the offense pretty quickly, and he's a competitor. He's one of those guys that goes in there, he's going to fight for every yard that he gets and catches the ball pretty well. It's going to be fun to have him back there and continue to get him acclimated and get him ready for the games."