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Chargers Week 1 Media Availability

Wednesday, September 8, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On how his relationship with QB Justin Herbert has developed since the start of training camp:

“I think we’ve learned more about each other, just because the spring wasn’t live. I think Justin got a full course on how we play and kind of the full inventory of what the offense could look like. But you don’t know what routes he likes, what personnel groupings we’re going to feature with our own players. The only way you can truly establish that is by getting that on the field timing. That’s been fun to work through. What I’ve enjoyed about it is there’s a lot that happens post-practice in learning about Justin as a quarterback. That’s why we stay after practice, to create that routine. That way we can discover even more. Those two have grown closer. It’s so important. Trust doesn’t happen right away. I think those two [Herbert and Offensive Coordinator Joe Lombardi] have done a nice job of both learning how one another communicates. That’s also the case with [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day and the rest of our offensive staff. Then, our quarterback room with [QB] Chase [Daniel] and [QB] Easton [Stick]; we’re really trying to create that think tank in there where everybody can work together well. I think that’s what’s happened. We try and activate a lot of our receivers, too. Learning those guys too — receivers, tight ends — and bringing all those guys together. I think Justin’s done a really good job of that. He’s coming into his own that way. We’ll see where it goes, but I liked how training camp has had established itself.”

On if T Bryan Bulaga will practice today:

“He will, full.”

On his assessment of Bulaga’s performance in Monday’s practice:

“He looked good. He went through the full practice, and he then felt good afterward, as importantly. He felt good on the off day. I know that he was here yesterday and got a good lift in. We’re excited to get the work week officially kicked off today.”

On if Bulaga is ‘trending toward’ playing on Sunday:

“Yes.”

On what will be going through his head on Sunday:

“I’m going to be thinking about all of their players and I’m going to be think about all of our players. I’m going to be totally focused on the plan. To your question, it’s a dream come true — I’m getting to live my dream. But, I feel like I was living my dream at John Carroll and at Hutchinson, too. I know this is a much bigger stage. I recognize that, but I feel like my dreams are just getting started. It’s my dream to be a competitor. I think we get the chance to do that against a good team. It’s an honor to be a head coach in the NFL. That’s the one thing I know. It’s a responsibility I take seriously every day. It’s an honor. I’m excited to compete with our team. It’s our first chance as a team to compete, and I’m really looking forward to seeing our guys play Sunday.”

On RB Justin Jackson:

“Justin Jackson’s full go. He’s been active on offense and in the kicking game. He’s really made a nice recovery from that groin. I’m proud of him and his response to that injury. I know what we talked about it a little bit a few weeks back. I think all of us are aware of his injury history in the pros. What he’s done better than ever is just really attack that rehab and get himself in a really good frame of mind. The mindset is as important as the physical side of things. He’s had a nice recovery and I’m proud of his progress. He’s an asset to our football team.”

On if he will have to ‘ease in’ Jackson:

“I don’t think so, no. He’s practiced full. That’s why I’m so optimistic. I’ve seen the movement. I’ve seen the change of direction. It hasn’t been individual only, even in team drills, snap counts and pitch counts and stuff like that, he’s been able to go full and that’s exciting.”

On DB Trey Marshall:

“Trey’s still recovering from a bit of an ankle. He had a residual [injury] from that first preseason game against Minnesota. We’re at the beginning of the season, we want to make sure it’s a long season and that he can be the Trey Marshall that we know that he’s capable of being. We’re just making sure that ankle is fully recovered. That also gives him the chance to acclimate to our system and be able to fully connect. See how we’re doing things now because there are a lot of differences. It’s more than anything just playing the long game with him, but nothing long-term.”

On which player will serve as the primary kickoff returner:

“We’re still working through that this week, but that group of guys that I talked about last week, those will be the feature guys. I would say that Nas [S Nasir Adderley], right now, is in the lead for that role, but we have those other guys, too — [RB] Larry [Rountree III], [RB] Justin [Jackson], [WR] KJ [Hill]. We’re just going to play the rest of the week out. We’re excited to see those guys progress.”

On which player will serve as the primary punt returner:

“[WR] KJ [Hill] is still the punt returner.”

On S Nasir Adderley’s development:

“So much of being a young player is finding that confidence. It’s one thing to have the talent to play in the NFL — Nas has a lot of talent — but that talent never expresses itself when you have full confidence in what you’re doing. Not only your own scheme, defense, having command of your techniques and schemes, but then what’s on the other side of the football. I think he’s come a long way. [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo Hill, [Secondary Coach] Derrick Ansley, and [Assistant Secondary Coach] Tommy Donatell have really taken this guy, and he’s dove in with them. He’s learned a lot more ball. You see a lot more confidence out there on the field. I think that you can measure that with his communication, and then post-snap, what his playstyle looks like. ‘Hey, is he running all over the place when he should just be calm?’ Or, is he calm when he should be running fast somewhere. You can measure his playstyle. I feel like he’s starting to assimilate nicely with how we want to play. We expect big things from him this year and on Sunday. He’s doing a really good job from a communication standpoint, which allows us to play the way we want to play in the secondary — moving guys around. The big thing about him that is to be determined is how well he’s going to tackle when it’s live. So much about defensive players is how they’re going to tackle when it’s live. We’re going to find out about that on Sunday. I’m looking forward to seeing it.”

On Adderley’s contributions to the defense:

“I really like how he is every day right now. He comes into the facility and there’s an energy where you can tell that he’s enjoying working at his game. I think that’s been fun for us. He’s a ball guy. When things don’t go well, he can respond quickly, which is so much of being a competitor, being able to overcome things quickly and keep it moving. There’s great opportunity for him. We’re counting on him. I think that he understands that. He’s been accountable to his teammates, the guys that have played with him. [S] Derwin [James Jr.] will say, ‘Yeah, Nas is different. He’s different. He’s better.’ That means a lot, coming from Derwin James, because he has high standards for his teammates and what he expects from them. Guys like him and [CB] Chris Harris [Jr.] do a great job for us of being that barometer for the temperature of the group. Nas, I feel like, is trending positive.”

On if Adderley has improved from last season to this season:

"I think so. I think that their vibe with him is much different, in a good way."

On working with QB Justin Herbert:

"I think it's been a work in progress. We've gotten to know each other so much more. I think that's allowed us to do so much more. It just takes time with people. I think everyone just expects so much from him, so much from us, and that can't happen right away. I feel like what we've done is we've kind of learned about one another — Hey, when's the right time to do this? When can we carve out our time and space and have had it happen naturally? But, also, making sure that happens because our communication is premium. I think we've done a good job of establishing that. Me being able to spend time with the offensive staff in the quarterback room, I feel like I've learned a lot about him. I think that he's learned a lot about me and us on defense. The way we play on offense, being able to make suggestions or talking about the game plan in depth, I think that we're still at the beginning of that, for sure. But, now we get to respond to real game competition. We'll know where our relationship is as the season goes on because once you start playing games, and a lot is at stake, that's when you really have to test your relationship. I know this, I couldn't ask more from a starting quarterback. As you guys know, he was elected captain. The way that he works on a day-to-day basis, it really pushes you as a coach because you're trying to be your best for guys like that."

On the development of the relationships between Herbert and the wide receivers:

"I think that he's able to tell them where he's putting it, and they can tell them where they feel like it's going to be — 'Hey, I'm going to throw this route to [TE] Jared Cook this way. I'm going to throw this route to [TE] Donald Parham [Jr.] that way. [WR] Mike Williams, I'm going to give him this chance, or, [WR] Josh [Palmer], I'm not going to do that with you. This is how you're going to be pressed versus how I beat press.' I feel like all those little things, Justin's been able to address more man-to-man and take more ownership that way. He's still at the beginning, but you can tell that he has full respect from his teammates. What he's doing is he's kind of he's kind of getting in his rhythm as the leader of our offense. Where he's very fortunate, when you're around [WR] Keenan Allen, that's like having another quarterback out there. I think that really helps Justin in a big way. I think that they can kind of feed off each other. Then, Keenan can talk to the other receivers for Justin at times, be that mouthpiece, too, because he's kind of an extension of Justin. It's been a fun group to watch."

On how Herbert has responded to Staley's 'defensive mentorship':

"Justin just knows a lot more football. When you're in the NFL, you just learn so much more. One year ago, what he knew, what I knew, are totally different. I look back at my tape last year and I'm like, 'Man, I wasn't very good, compared to where I am now.' I think that that's how he feels. I think that he's learned so much about his game, fundamentally, and then learning a new offense. Then, defensively, I think that he is just more aware of what's out there. I think so much, as a young quarterback, is being able to identify what's on the other side of the football, because all these quarterbacks that are going out there are really sharp. There's not a quarterback that goes out there that isn't impressive. It's a really hard job. They're all sharp. Justin's particularly sharp. But, I think so much of it is what's on the other side of the ball, because that really allows you to play fast and free. I think, hopefully, what we're done with our defense is get him a lot of shots at what's on the other side of the ball, being able to identify a lot from a personnel grouping standpoint, front standpoint, pressure, coverage. The more you see, as a player, the better you get. If you hear all these great quarterbacks that have ever played — the Hall of Fame quarterbacks they just talked at the Hall of Fame ceremony, they just talked about all of their experiences and how much better you get as you go, that reflection. I think he's learned a lot. That's something that's a strength of his, he's a perfectionist. He knows that he has to learn more. He doesn't ever feel like he has it all figured out. That's why he's going to be successful."

On Herbert 'taking ownership' of the offense:

"I think that your offense will never be as good as it can be if your quarterback doesn't become the face of the offense. I think that that's what Justin has been able to do in his own way. I think when people say face of the offense, they have this idea of what it should be; what it should be is Justin Herbert. He's different than everybody else. That's what I think has been good for him. Like I said, him being elected captain is a great sign, with as many votes that he got from his teammates, the way they feel about him and the way they think about his ownership. That's what's exciting, because that's what means the most. It doesn't matter what I think, as much as what as teammates think. Everybody that's in that huddle believes in him, and not just

because he's a special talent, it's because of who he is. You guys have heard me say it, one of his greatest strengths is that he's one of the guys."

On Herbert's involvement in building this week's gameplan:

"Yesterday, just being in the quarterback room with him, [QB] Chase [Daniel] and [QB] Easton [Stick] — I got a coffee and was able to spend some time in there, seeing what his rhythm and processes from a note-taking standpoint, what he's looking at, what's important to him. As the night goes on, he's still here. What's he been doing? We're brand new together, and our offensive staff is brand new, so just us finding that routine together where we really feel confident in our preparation. That's the one thing that you can count on with him. He's kind of a very astute note-taker, where he's not talking a lot sometimes, like he's in observation mode. If you study people like that, that's a really good trait. Sometimes people that talk a lot, they're really not saying anything. When Justin talks, you know that it means something, so I really enjoy that about him. He takes a lot in, he absorbs a lot. When he talks, you know that you need to be listening. That's a great quality of his. In the game-planning process, that's what we're kind of learning about him right now."

On the difference in gameplanning for a Week 1 opponent, compared to the middle of the season:

"There could be some unknowns, based off who they have and what they've shown in the preseason. There's some inventory on coordinators. Certainly, a quarterback like [Washington QB] Ryan Fitzpatrick who's played a lot of football, you kind of know the style of play. I guess there's just there's more unknowns for both coaches and players, where once the rhythm of the season happens — you get three or four weeks, they've kind of expressed that this is who we are. That element of surprises isn't there anymore. So, going into that first game, there's always that element. There's nervousness. There's excitement with that. That's why you have to just really trust your training and your preparation. You got to make sure that you have clean gameplans that your players can go execute the best you can because there are going to be some things that you maybe didn't see — and that's okay, that's football. If you didn't see it, that's OK, we still have a foundation of the principles that we have to fall back on. That's why, early in the season, we really try to make sure — the best we can, as coaches — that your gameplans can absorb a lot of things that you haven't seen."

On S Derwin James Jr.'s impact on the defense:

"It means a great deal. I think everyone is aware of the record of this team without him and the record of this team with him. That's, usually, a great predictor of your value. Not just from a pure player standpoint, but from a competitor and leadership standpoint, you can't put a price or a value on the energy and the feeling that you have every day when he's there. Just a rare, rare guy. Really glad that we have him."

On the Chargers experiencing 'early-season struggles' in previous seasons:

"I'm aware of what's happened. We're here, and I'm aware of kind of how we've done where I've been and the expectations that we have. The one thing about any new season is that it's a new season. No matter what level of ball you're in, how you start and where you finish are two different places. Sometimes you get off to a great start and you keep it that way. Sometimes you get off to a slow start and you keep it that way. Sometimes you start slow, finished fast, and vice-versa. I think what we're trying to establish here is just a standard of performance, where every day, no matter what it is, win or lose, that we have a standard of performance, a standard of preparation. I think that's what we've been able to kick off this week with, our standard of performance when it comes to preparing to play a game. It's not going to be that much different than how it was to prepare in training camp. That's what I've enjoyed. When you go out there today, it feels like it did three weeks ago preparing for the 49ers [joint practices] in training camp. That's what you want. You want to create that environment where every day is important, not just when the regular season games start. I think that we've been able to do that. That's what the single biggest thing for me was coming here, just establishing a standard of performance all the time that is not only measured in the regular season, it's measured every day. That's what we're you know. We'll see where it goes in terms of the wins and losses here now that it's real."

On the secondary:

"I think that they are all ball guys. I feel like we have created a really specific culture in there. The coaching staff and the players coming together to play the way we want to play, we asked a lot of these guys. I think the environment in there is where I want it to be. When I say that, it's because I know where it's going to be because I know how hungry these guys are. These guys are becoming the type of competitors that we're looking for because they have really hard jobs out there on the field. The secondary in the NFL, with as many adjustments that you have to make mentally nowadays, and then physically what you have to do, being able to cover all these guys, and you got to be able to tackle, now you got to be involved in the kicking game, there's just a lot that's required with the way we play. I think that group has really come together nicely. We have a nice blend of veteran experience, brand new in the middle. Corner, safety, a lot of versatility. We're trying our best to keep making it better. I love our coaching staff in that room. It's a premium DB environment and I'm honored to be part of it because I get better every day that I'm in there, too."

On if CB Asante Samuel Jr. has 'officially earned the second CB spot':

"He has."

On if he has changed at all since being named head coach:

"Yes, I think I have. I think that you definitely change. I think you're a lot more aware of the scope of the job. I think that you have an idea. That's an excellent question because I'm not the same, I'm a lot different. You have to be because there's so much more that comes to your plate — not that you weren't expecting, but that this is the first time that you're doing this. When I was a defensive coordinator, I had done all of that before. I had done literally everything. There wasn't a lot new coming across my desk, from an operational standpoint. Where as a head coach, there's a lot more that's new for me. I think that's been exciting because it brings out the best in you. I feel like I've gotten better as I've gone. Every day, there is still so many things on a list that I didn't do well enough. But then you just wake up and keep going. I think that we've established a really good environment here with the coaching staff and players, support staff. I'm surrounded by a lot of really good people who complement me, who fill in a lot of my blind spots, a lot of my weaknesses. As you go as a head coach, you just learn that it's always ongoing. You're on call 24/7, and you better be. There are going to be some tough days, and I'm ready for them because I know that they're coming. Now that you're in the regular season, there's going to be some losses, wins, high moments, low moments. I think what you try to do is just stay consistent, be yourself, surround yourself with special people and just keep moving. I've learned a lot in however many months it's been — January, so however many months that's been. I've learned a lot. I don't see that happening any time soon because I study all of these coaches who have coached a lot longer than I have that every year, every day, you're just getting so much better, you're learning so much. I'm trying to be that way, too."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**On Washington's defensive front:**

"They're a really incredible front seven. They're about as good as it gets. They have some guys in coverage, too, that can play pretty good football. They're a defense that flies around and makes plays. They tackle well. That's what we talked about this morning — [Offensive Coordinator] Coach Joe [Lombardi] said it, they tackle well. They're a good defense and they need all of our attention. We have to have a good week of practice."

On how Washington's front compares to facing Tampa Bay's last season:

"Personality-wise, they're both very good teams. Structurally and schematically, they're a little different, but they both like to get after the passer."

On the value of last season:

"I think it's just experience. Being out there and seeing different defenses and going through, being able to rep different plays and have a sense of being comfortable out there is huge. Having an offseason to go through the entire playbook, and to be able to go up against a really good defense in our defense, I think that taught me a lot."

On why he 'is so good' at learning new offensive systems, dating back to his collegiate career at Oregon:

"That's a good question. I think it goes back to school and having good study habits, being able to try and pick things up quickly. You have to work hard. You have to put the work in to get it figured out. It's never easy, and I wouldn't really want it any other way. It's obviously a tough scheme that we have to learn, but all of the guys the guys here, they put in a lot of effort. I think it's been going pretty well so far."

On S Derwin James Jr.'s impact on the team:

"He does so much for the defense. He's a vocal leader. He's a guy that flies around and is able to cover guys, able to make tackles. They're going to pressure him off the sides and they're going to do a bunch of things with him that not too many safeties can do. He's a special guy, a special player, a special person in that locker room. He's been able to do so much for our team."

On the experience gained by going through a head coaching change:

"Well, fortunately, I've been through that before and I've kind of seen that aspect of football. It's obviously a tough situation when you lose a coaching staff that you've become close with. It's never easy. But, you have to look at it as a good opportunity to learn more about football. All of these schemes and all of the things that they bring are going to be different. You get to see more football, you get to learn more. I think that aspect of my background has helped me."

On if the 'Victory Brisket' tradition will carry into this season:

"I hope so, we'll see. Game-time decision."

On the value of 'being a meticulous note taker':

"It's huge because I need to have a great grasp of the offense. I think notes are big because I like to go over my notes. If they're clean and they're neat, I know exactly where everything is. So I can look back and say, for example, we're playing Washington later in the year, I have a notebook full of the stuff that we went through, the plays that we learned, all of the stuff on their personnel. I think that's a huge start for taking notes, and having a good feel for the offense and being able to step up. With all of these kills and alerts, having a good feel for the offense so that when we go out there, we have a chance to win."

On Week 1 being his first live game operation with C Corey Linsley:

"I think it's huge. Fortunately, we were able to go against the 49ers in those joint practices and we're able to see some live reps. Although I wasn't live, we we're able to feel the pressure and the procedure of going through each play, and to be able to point, redirect, things like that. It's been great. Corey, he's an outstanding player. He knows so much. I know that he's been putting a lot of good work this week so that come Sunday we're ready to go."

On the potential of 'being a Super Bowl contending team':

"That's not for me to decide. Our play will set that standard. Hopefully, we just go out there and execute, do things well, listen to our coaches and play for one another. Whatever happens, happens. That kind of lies outside of our control. All that we can control is our effort, our attitude, showing up to work each week with a good attitude and go out there and have fun."

On what qualifies as a 'successful season':

"To be the best team that we can be. To show up every game, give our best, get better, continue to stay healthy, do our best to avoid injuries and do all of that stuff. Then, execute — go out there and listen to our coaches, kind of like I just said. It's up to us to play well, to work hard and do all of those things."

On meeting Washington QB Ryan Fitzpatrick this past offseason:

"It was awesome. He's such a nice guy. The things he's been able to do on the football field are incredible. I've grown up watching him. I've been a big fan of his for a long time Being able to talk with him, talk about what's going on in the offseason and how he's been doing, everything like that. It was really cool."

On if his preparation process with Offensive Coordinator Joe Lombardi will emulate how the Saints conducted their pregame preparations:

“I’m not sure. We got the game plan this morning and we’ve been looking at it. I think that’s something that we’ll have to address later on in the week. He’s been really good about installing, prepping. We’ve been watching on film the past couple of weeks. We’ll see.”

On further developing relationships with his wide receivers:

“I think it’s only gotten better. We’ve spent so much time together, whether it’s on the football field, in the film room, in the weight room, just spending time with those guys and getting to know each other, I think that’s huge for when you step on the field and you start talking about timing, what you need from them and what they need from you. So, having a good relationship, being able to communicate exactly what you want on each route, I think that’s the standard.”

On WR Joshua Palmer:

“Josh has been awesome. He stepped in immediately. He’s been able to pick up things very quickly. He’s been thrown out there. A lot of tough situations that he’s had to go through, he’s fought through. He’s done really well with all of the adversity. He’s one of those guys that I really admire out there.”

On the relationships he had with his head coaches at Oregon and how that compares to his relationship with Head Coach Brandon Staley:

“I really enjoyed all of my time with all of those coaches. [Former Oregon Head Coach and current Florida Atlantic Head] Coach [Willie] Taggart, [Oregon Head] Coach [Mario] Cristobal, I learned so many things from them. Kind of like I said earlier, different schemes, different schematics. It was a good opportunity to learn from them. When Coach Staley came in, he built a relationship immediately with all of his players. That’s something that he really wanted to set up. I remember getting the call maybe 30 or 40 minutes after everyone found out and that meant a lot to me, him reaching out and letting me know. He’s done an incredible job. He comes in our quarterback room all of the time and talks about defenses — sometimes things that get too complex for us — but it’s really fun to listen to.”

On the Chargers ‘having early-season struggles in recent seasons’:

“That’s something that you think about, but I was only here last year. I’ve really just focused on my time at Oregon and my time here. It’s just something that you have to build on. I know that we have the guys and the talent here where we just have to go out and execute. Ultimately, that’s what it comes down to.”

SAFTEY DERWIN JAMES JR.

On entering Week 1 healthy:

“It’s a blessing. I thank God every day for it. I can’t wait. It’s been a long journey. There’s been a lot of hard work, and now it’s finally here.”

On playing with DE Joey Bosa:

“I’m excited. I love that dude Bosa. He brings a lot of energy, and he’s a great player to play with. We always talk about both of us out there. It’s going to be a problem for the offense. Finally, both of us get to go out there on Sunday.”

On what he’s learned from Bosa:

“Joey’s shown me a lot. How to constantly work my hands; how to use my speed to my advantage. Of course, what works for him may not work for me. But [he teaches me how] to use my stuff to my advantage, going against running backs and tight ends.”

On the similarity of the Chargers defensive scheme to the system he ran at Florida State:

“It’s kind of similar, but it’s also way different. I am doing every role you can think of. I can’t wait, I’m excited. I played everything at Florida State, too. I am really playing the same, but not the same.”

On Washington QB Ryan Fitzpatrick:

"I think he's a great quarterback. When he's at his best, when he's making plays – he'll take a risk and throw to his receivers to get them open. We have to be ready. When he gets hot, he gets rolling. You have to be alert."

On ways of 'shutting down' Fitzpatrick:

"Make it about us. Come out there, play our style of defense. What they're doing has nothing to do with us. Coming out there and being us will take care of stuff."

On his feeling about the Chargers defensive scheme:

"I like that we are very multiple. You're going to have to figure out where guys are. By the time the ball snaps, we are already moving around. It's going to be tough."

On S Nasir Adderley:

"You can tell by his body structure, his confidence. He's making calls before I can get them out sometimes. That's a good sign. I am very excited for Nas. He works hard every day."

On difference between Head Coach Brandon Staley and former Head Coach Anthony Lynn:

"Both are great coaches. They are different in their own way. I would just say, it's different because Coach Lynn wasn't a defensive coordinator. Having Coach Staley as my coach and as the head coach is the difference."

On his play-calling communication with Head Coach Brandon Staley:

"Coach Staley is very open. He brings it to us, his plan. He listens to us, he sees how we see it, too. He asks how we see it. We are constantly communicating and that's what makes him so great as a coach. It's not just, 'Hey, you do it this way.' It's both ends of the stick."