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Chargers Media Availability

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HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On ending practice with a punt return competition between the offense and defense:

"It was time to have some fun. I think that our guys earned it. This was the last practice before the end of the preseason. I thought that our guys, number one, had a really good practice. Two, just looking back and reflecting on training camp, I think that it was a job well done by everyone here — coaches, players, staff. It was that perfect sweet spot to earn an opportunity to have some fun at the end of practice. We certainly had some fun there."

On if there was 'anything on the line' in the punt return competition:

"There are specific rules that the NFL has put in place as it relates to other activities. Today was more about pride."

On which quarterback will start on Saturday against the Seahawks:

"We're going to start [QB] Chase [Daniel] in the game. [QB] Easton [Stick] will go in the second half."

On if the quarterbacks will each play a half:

"Yes."

On evaluating a quarterback's performance when one player is playing later in the game with a 'lesser' offensive line:

"I think that there's a lot in the game that you can evaluate; how they are operating in and out of the huddle, the decisions that they're making when they're under duress. Even with our first-team O-line in there, when you go against a really good front, you're going to have pockets that are like that. Your decision-making, the operation in and out of the huddle, are you seeing the game the right way? I think that's a big factor in it. Then, what happens out here at practice? We've been practicing for about a month now and we've had a lot of data, tracking all of these practices. We feel like it's going to give us a full evaluation on these guys. Just proud of the way that both guys have handled this entire training camp, the entire offseason. I think that they've truly made each other better. Like I've mentioned before, we're really fortunate that we have both guys."

On if WR Michael Bandy or CB KJ Sails will handle punt return duties if WR KJ Hill Jr. does not play on Saturday:

"Yeah, those guys will get a crack at it, for sure. We've been training a bunch of guys there to try and get as many looks as possible. Those guys can definitely do it. We've tried to get as many guys catches as possible. In this game, you're hopefully going to see a bunch of them back there, both kicks and punts."

On WR Mike Williams:

"Progressing. His energy is good. It feels like he's getting closer. I feel like next week we should be able to get him out there on the practice field and start to get him his wind in more of a practice setting, where he's running routes. This week was a good foundation for him coming back. It's going to be a big lift for our offense when he comes back."

On the week between the end of preseason games and the start of the regular season:

“I think that it’s smart by the NFL. You guys have probably heard about getting your team back, physically — I think that it’s a great way to get your team back physically, get ahead on the plan and still have that healthy Chargers vs. Chargers competition, too. You don’t want to get so ahead on the gameplan for Washington that you take your own team for granted. We’ll still be able to compete, Chargers on Chargers, and start to get ahead on the plan for Washington.”

On if LB Amen Ogbongbemiga’s injury could potentially ‘linger’:

“I don’t think so. He has an AC [Joint] Sprain. His range of motion has really improved since the ball game. From what I understand, he’s going to be ready to go for game one. We’ll just see where it goes here with the roster spots and stuff like that. He’s not going to play in the game this week. I wanted to make sure that this guy is safe. He wants to be out there. He came in Monday after the game and said, ‘Hey, Coach, I want to play.’ I was like, ‘Man, one preseason game is not going to make a difference in your evaluation. We know how we feel about you, we’ve been able to see you live now for over a month and we’ve seen you in two preseason games.’ We have enough of a sample size to make a decision with him. It’s, more than anything, making sure that he’s safe before he goes out there. It’s just an AC [Joint] Sprain. Like I said, he’s had really good motion the last couple of days. Hopefully, we’ll be able to get him back here soon.”

On the competition at kicker:

“I’ve enjoyed watching it unfold. From an operation standpoint, I think that [LS Matt] Overton and [P] Ty Long have been exceptional. Those guys have kind of gotten into a rhythm together so that we can get a clean evaluation of the kickers. From an operational standpoint, it’s even. Those two have brought the best out in one another. [K Michael] Badgley’s professionalism, his experience, has really rubbed off on [K] Tristan [Vizcaino]. Then, Tristan has rubbed off on Mike in a positive way, too, because he brings something different to the table than Mike does. I think that they both get pushed in different ways. From a pure production standpoint, I think that they both had quality preseasons. It’s not like you’re making a decision where one of them is really good and one of them is down here, and then there is this flip-flop every day — or, both of them are down here, both really inconsistent. They both have had really good camps. I feel like that’s going to be a tough decision for us. Like I told you guys, it’s a complete evaluation — it’s field goals and kickoffs. We’re going to take this down to the end and they’re both going to get to kick this weekend. We’re excited to see them finish.”

On if T Rashawn Slater, CB Asante Samuel Jr. and WR Joshua Palmer will play on Saturday:

“We’re going to work through that tonight. We’ll get the final report from practice today, and then we’ll make those decisions. You’ll know before the game, based on who is warming up way before the game — way before the game, who is playing and who isn’t.”

On if LB Kenneth Murray Jr. will play on Saturday:

“We got K9 the action that we wanted in the San Francisco game. It’s going to be very similar to the other day, perhaps minus a few guys. It’s not going to be some wholesale thing where nobody is out there. We’re still going to compete, but there could be a couple of more guys that aren’t playing, as opposed to the San Francisco game.”

On if Staley ‘takes into account’ which players Seahawks Head Coach Pete Carroll has held out of the preseason to help determine which Chargers players will not play on Saturday:

“I don’t really connect with coaches in that way. Sometimes if they announce it, like in the Rams game — when [Rams Head Coach] Sean [McVay] says, ‘Hey, 35 guys aren’t playing,’ you just take that information for what it is. With Pete, I think that there is a good mix of his guys that haven’t been out there. I think that they’re treating it a little bit similar to us. I know that Russ [Seahawks QB Russell Wilson] and [Seahawks SS] Jamal [Adams] and stuff like that, they haven’t played — [Seahawks LB] Bobby [Wagner]. I think that it’s more similar to how we’ve approached it, where the guys who need the work are getting it and the guys that don’t are resting. I think that it’ll be similar in this last game, but I know that what we’re going to do is we’re going to have a gameplan that gives those guys, in this last game, a chance to compete. It’s really important to us. We’re excited to go compete on Saturday night.”

On if the kicking reps will be split on situations or with each kicker getting a half of regulation on Saturday:

“To be honest, probably a little bit of both in this game because we want to get both guys some cracks at it. We’re going to flip-flop who starts the game, so [K] Tristan [Vizcaino] will start the game this time and Badge [K Michael Badgley] will come through second. We’ll try to get them as many opportunities. Situationally, maybe manage it a little bit differently where, hey, we want to see these guys kick, and try to put them into as many kicking situations as possible to get them some live looks.”

On ‘how much potential weighs into injury history’ when evaluating a player prior to roster cut-downs:

“I think that it plays a component in it. Again, I think that you have to take all of the context that you have, all of the data that you have, and use all of it to your advantage to make a good decision. In the course of J.J. [RB Justin Jackson], I’ve really liked how he’s responded to that groin setback. He has really attacked this rehab, from what I understand, better than he ever has. He’s back sooner than he ever has. That, to me, is a great sign. He’s responded a lot better. I know that his spirits are high and I know that he’s an asset for our football team. I know that before he was injured, he was having an outstanding camp, as a runner, receiver and on special teams for us. All I can go by, to further answer your question, is how they’ve responded since I’ve been here. What happened before, I wasn’t here for a lot of that. What’s happened in front of my own two eyes, and in front of our eyes, as a staff, that’s what we’re going to take the most into the evaluation process, and I really like what Justin has done for us.”

On TE Tre’ McKitty:

“He has some knee soreness. We’re just trying to be careful with him. He’s had a good camp. As you guys have heard me say, this guy looks like a pro player. I know that he can do the jobs that we drafted him to do. We’re really excited about his potential. You’ve seen glimpses of it throughout camp. Like most of these guys, consistency and performance is going to be a good factor in his long-term success. I know that we really like coaching him. He’s tough. Now, we just want to make sure that he’s healthy, so we gave him a day here to rest.”

On OLB Emeke Egbule:

“It’s been good to get him back. Number one, that’s a pretty thin edge group right now. He gives a lot to our special teams. I know that he does a lot of those big skill jobs that you need. It’s been really good to get him back. He looks healthy. I know that he’s not 100 percent, but he’s healthy enough to play and compete. We’re excited to let him go play a full game this weekend so that we can judge him fully.”

On if the team is ‘on schedule’ entering the final preseason game:

“Yeah, I like the way you said that. I do feel like we’re on schedule as a team. I know that we’ve become a team. I know in all three phases of the game that people know how we want to play. Every player and coach knows exactly how we want to play in those three phases. They know how we want to meet. They know how we want to practice, prepare and train. I feel that full investment. I see that full investment. I think that’s a big goal in training camp — you’re laying that foundation of your team. We’ve been able to measure ourselves against other people, which has been fantastic. We’ve been able to measure ourselves against one another. When you have quality football players on your team, you create that competition that you’re hoping really makes everybody better. I feel like all that has happened on this practice field, that competition is happening every single day. That’s really what I wanted. I feel like we’re right on course, like you said.”

On preventing injuries:

“I think it’s an awesome point and I’m aware of all of the things you guys mentioned before I came here. I think the validation [of strategy to minimize injuries] comes from the players. I think, when you talk to them, when you interview them that they’re the validation. They can tell you about how we’re doing things. I think that they’re the validation that I’m looking for. I think our camp is a validation. I know that I’m very pleased. I’m very happy because I know that they’re in a good place and I know that they’re fully-invested in what we’re doing and how we’re doing it. That’s a big component of it — getting your team healthy to the first game and doing the best you can knowing that it’s impossible to keep your team fully healthy. I think what our players know is that everybody here is fully-invested in them being as good as they can be. I think our players are very confident in that. That was a big goal of mine coming here because I’m aware of what it’s been like here in the past.”

On S Derwin James Jr.:

“There aren’t many players like him in the league on any side of the ball. There aren’t many players like Derwin James because you have rare talent. Rare talent. Rare size and speed, which are critical factors for the position. He has rare skills for the position. He can do anything on the field and play anywhere. He’s your signal-caller. I’m not aware of any other DBs in the league that are the signal caller. You can make the case that he’s the leader of our entire football team and the face of your football team — certainly one of them. I haven’t been around too many guys like that regardless of the position. Normally, it’s quarterbacks. Derwin is one of the few defensive players, that I’m aware of, in the league that can carry that mantle.”

On WR Jalen Guyton:

“JG, we got him wrapped up the other day. He was kind of in routes out there and just felt a little tight. He played a really good game against San Francisco. He had a nice return. We’re just being careful with him because he’s had an outstanding camp. I think, because of that cumulative effect of some other wideouts going down, we just wanted to make sure that he was feeling good. We kind of had that string of [WR] Joe Reed, [WR] Mike [Williams] and other guys [get hurt]. We just wanted to make sure that we were careful with him before the game.”

On WR KJ Hill Jr.:

“At the end of the ball game, he kind of had a tweak. You know that slant-route he caught on third down towards the end of the game? He just kind of felt a little something there. Again, more just being careful with him. It’s not a concern long-term. We’re just making sure. He played a hard-fought game and was returning for us. We’re just being careful with him.”

On WR Joe Reed:

“He’s getting closer. He’s improving. I know his ankle, the swelling went way down. His mobility and range of motion are much better. I know he’s feeling close to getting back.”

On DL Jerry Tillery:

“Like I said, it’s a case-by-case basis. I think where we are with our front depth, that position is such a physical position. It’s such an attrition position. I feel like Jerry has had just a phenomenal camp. We don’t have the same depth there that we have in the secondary. I think the depth plays a factor in that, for sure. I think that [CB Michael] Vato [Davis] understands that. I think that there’s an element of how we play that’s a little bit different than how they played before in the secondary. We want Mike to be out there functioning the way we play. We needed him, too, because we were down some secondary guys. It was good to get him that quarter of work. I appreciate these because we told these guys. We were very transparent about it being case-by-case and telling them exactly why we’re doing everything we’re doing. I think Vato is a guy that’s benefitting from going out there, just like [LB] Kenneth Murray [Jr.]. Just getting a quarter of work and we needed that for those two guys. I think, for Jerry, his circumstances are just a little bit different because of your defensive line depth.”

On what he’s looking for from Saturday’s game:

“I think it’s such an important question. I don’t know if change your mind is quite the right way of looking at it, but confirming what’s in your mind, I think? I think people can do that one way or the other. I think that any time you get a chance to compete that you get to represent who you are. I think what we’re trying to do is give our guys a game plan where, if there are some questions that we have, that we’re able to get them answered. When we put in the plan for this preseason game, a lot of it is just getting the guys in the right seats so we can get that final evaluation. Okay, let’s run a couple of plays for these guys to see how they do. On defense, let’s put these guys in some tough positions defensively to see them cover and see them rush. If we’re having to make a couple of tough decisions, let’s give them one more shot at it in the return game and kickers. It’s just that last part of it just so that we can feel good about what we already think.”

On making roster cuts:

“I think it’s going to be tough on us because we have enough depth at some positions where you’re going to have to make difficult decisions — which is a good thing for your organization. I’m proud of the way that our guys have competed and that they’ve made it really tough on us. That competition has been really healthy. No matter what happens, we’re going to be really proud of the way we organized this camp.”

On evaluating needs of one position over another:

“I think what you have to do is try to put the very best 53 — the combination of 53 guys. Not the most talented 53, but the best 53. The right 53. I think that math can happen a lot of different ways. I think, as you guys know, there’s a lot of different models out there. I think what we try to do is just say, ‘Who are the right 53 guys for this team?’ Then, knowing that it can change. It’s not just the 53 for the season. There’s a lot that changes in the NFL. Four years ago, [Bears LB] Khalil Mack wasn’t even on the Chicago Bears yet. He wasn’t even on the team yet. There’s a lot that can happen in the NFL. From a 53 standpoint, I know me, [General Manager] Tom [Telesco], the Spanos Family — we believe in putting the right 53 together. However that shakes out, I know that we’ll be proud of it, and knowing that it’s ongoing throughout the season. It’s a long season.”

On depth at guard:

“Normally, you go with nine [offensive linemen], especially with the new rules. If you go with nine, you’re looking for a swing inside guy and a swing outside guy, then you’re looking for a guy that can play center. I think that we have that. I think that [G/T] Brenden [Jaimes] certainly can play multiple positions. I think [C/G Scott] Qwes [Quessenberry] can play any of the interior positions. I think we have enough flex at tackle with [T] Storm [Norton], [T] Trey [Pipkins III], [G] Ryan [Hunter]. [G/T] Tyree [St. Louis] has kicked out there. I just think that we’ve been able to duke that out. [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line] Frank [Smith], [Assistant Offensive Line Coach] Shaun [Sarrett] and [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] have done a really good job of getting those guys looks out there at those multiple positions. I feel confident going into this that our offensive line is going to be able to move if it has to based on injuries.”

DEFENSIVE LINEMAN CHRISTIAN COVINGTON**On what the sides were betting:**

“We have no idea. I guess it’s to be determined, but at the end of the day, competition is competition. I have to give it to the offense, defense couldn’t pull through today.”

On how training camp has been:

“It’s been good. It’s been a grind. Training camp is training camp at the end of the day. With this group of guys and this coaching staff, it’s great to see. We’re a good, solid group of guys on both sides of the ball, and special teams. We put in a lot of hard work, especially in this offseason program. To see the results showing day in and day out in camp has been fantastic. Especially being able to see it translate onto the field come gameday. I’m excited to see what this team has to offer.”

On DL Linval Joseph:

“LJ is the man. When you have a veteran like him on a team like this, any wisdom he can impart on us is huge. It’s critical. You can learn a lot from him on and off the field based on his approach to the game, as a true professional. To have him on this defensive line has been outstanding. He’s first and foremost a great teammate, and a great ball player.”

On Head Coach Brandon Staley:

“Brother is smart. Coach Staley knows the ins and outs. It’s also nice to have a coach with an entirely defensive mindset. Biasedly, to see what he’s been able to put into this team defensively has been tremendous. The passion that he gives and the intelligence he brings to this table is a new energy. It’s my first year with this team, but it’s been a breath of fresh air just to see what he’s doing at the helm.”

On Staley’s football intelligence:

“He’s a true X’s and O’s guy. He knows how to break down every position, doesn’t matter if it’s offense, defense, or special teams. He knows exactly how to contribute with every single position. It doesn’t matter if we’re in the meeting room, on the practice field or come game day.”

On the difference between Bengals Head Coach Zac Taylor's approach and Brandon Staley's:

"Coach Staley is a great coach and that's a great organization they have over there [in Cincinnati]. They're rebuilding the organization around a young player [QB Joe Burrow], the young team over there. I wish them the best. There are similarities there [between Taylor and Staley]. But there was more of an offensive mindset with Coach Taylor and it's nice to be with a defensive-minded coach with Coach Staley. You love to see the positives in everybody, and during my time with Cincinnati, there were some amazing qualities in Coach Taylor. But I'm happy to be here, happy to see what I can do with the defensive scheme that we're in. I'm happy to be in this defense."

SAFETY ALOHI GILMAN**On his comfortability going into year two:**

"There's a huge difference. Last year was a difficult year for everyone with Covid-19 and no full offseason. Having a full offseason and being in the league already helps me understand how to work. I'm learning how to be a professional and I feel way more comfortable and confident in what I'm doing."

On his role within Defensive Coordinator Renaldo Hill's scheme:

"It's different. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley does a good job of using a lot of personnel groupings. Using our players to the best of their abilities. He moves [S] Derwin [James Jr.], a lot so that frees my role up. It gives me opportunities to play different positions on the field. It's something I'm excited about. I'm ready to go."

On mastering a new defensive scheme:

"It's a heavy playbook, but mastering it just takes a lot of composure and patience. Coach Staley and the staff did a good job of teaching us this offseason by concept. Which is a big deal because everything's connected. I did a good job and I feel good about my studying and applying it on the field. Now it's just a matter of growing on it and getting better every day."

On Hill's approach:

"I've only been in the league two years, going into my second year now. But comparing last year to this year, learning concepts and principals this year was much better. The learning curve was a lot quicker for everyone. You can see that in everyone from the younger guys to the older guys and the veterans. I think it's been a huge role for us."