

Josh.Rupprecht@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jennifer.Rojas@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jamaal.LaFrance@chargers.nfl.com  
Brock.Anderson@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Lauren.Meyer@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Danny.Markino@chargers.nfl.com

## Chargers Media Availability

Wednesday, January 12, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On the timeline for ‘mastering’ a defensive scheme:**

“I think that the timelines are all different with new defenses. Last year, when I was with the Rams, it happened quickly. When I was in Chicago with [former Bears Defensive Coordinator] Vic [Fangio], it happened over the course of really three or four years; that was when we really hit our stride. I think it took three seasons for us to be in the top-10 [in total defense], and then, that 2018 year, we were the best defense. I just think all timelines are different. With our group this year, I think we laid a good foundation in terms of how we want to play. Now, it’s just updating our personnel. The people that we do have, getting them in the right roles and making sure that we continue to teach and develop the scheme better. But I think that the timelines of all — the defense, offense, kicking game — they’re all different. I’m excited to have a full offseason with the guys who are coming back because I know that those guys that we’re going to build this defense with, that we’re certainly going to be able to play at a high level, at a championship level.”

#### **On ‘the plan’ for LB Kenneth Murray Jr. moving forward:**

“Kenneth is a behind-the-ball linebacker who does have some edge characteristics. He can give you some scheme and flexibility that way, but he’s an off-the-ball stack linebacker. I think that so much of his development is just the consistency and performance, and making sure that he is available. This year, he had two different ankle [injuries]; one in the preseason, one at the beginning of the season. Then, he goes down with COVID[-19]. Then, our numbers at other places where we’re really depleted. It’s just having a full offseason under his belt, get on the grass in the offseason, in the OTAs, and then have a full training camp. Then, I think we’ll have a much clearer picture of who he is as a player.”

#### **On OLB Uchenna Nwosu ‘being their type of player’**

“I think that Uchenna is certainly one of them. I think Uchenna had a really, really, really solid season for us. I think in that last game that we played, he was fantastic in the game. I think that he’s the type of guy that we want to build with. He has the toughness, he has versatility, the play-making ability. I think that he really fits who we want to be on the edge; he can rush the passer, he can really set the edge in the run front and gives you coverage flexibility. He’s a flexible player; you can put them in a lot of different places in pass rush. I think he really fits us and I felt like he was able to express his full talents in our system. Hopefully, we’ll be able to continue to work with him. I know that he’s a free agent, but just thought that he was one of the bright spots on our defense this year, for sure.”

#### **On ‘if there are enough of those guys on the current roster’:**

“With your scheme, you’re always going to try and fit what you do to who you have. In building a defense, you certainly have an idea of what you want it to look like. I think that that takes time. Sometimes it’s set up to happen right away, and sometimes it’s going to take some time. I think that this year, we did the best that we could. I thought we tried to fit how we played to who we had. I think the challenge for us this year was that there was a lot of inconsistency in who was out there, upfront at the point of attack, and then in the secondary. I thought it made it challenging for our guys and I thought that our guys hung in there, they hung tough. I thought that we gave ourselves a chance in these games, but certainly, to play the level of defense that I expect to play, we’re going to have to continue to improve. I think that, again, that takes place over time. I’m excited to attack this offseason and make that happen.”

**On his first season as head coach and defensive play-caller:**

“It was energizing. Yeah, it required a lot of me, but I felt like it brought out the best in me, too. I’m fortunate that I have a lot of really good coaches around me, a lot of good players, and a personnel department and ownership that believe in me and how we do things. I certainly think that I improved as the season went on. I feel like that’s a strength of mine, being able to coordinate and call the defense. I didn’t feel like it took away from my ability to be the head coach at all. I felt really connected each and every week to our offensive plan, our special teams plan. I felt like being able to go into each week and attack that week and play that game the way it needed to be played; I feel like I improved a lot as the season went on. I know that next year — so much this year happened, things were happening for the first time all the time. Now, I have that library of experiences to really draw from. I know how much I’m going to improve next year, for sure.”

**On ‘the defense’s difficulty in getting off the field on third down and stopping the run’:**

“There were different junctures in the season where that wasn’t the case. At the beginning of the season on third down, when we had our primary coverage and rush players, that we were doing well on third down. In the run defense, it didn’t start off the way we had hoped. I think after the bye, we played a lot more the way that we needed to play. I felt like we made a lot of improvements. When that happened, then with our coverage players, we went through a lot of attrition in the secondary, which affected how we covered on third down in known-pass [situations]. We just never had that cohesiveness of both units, the front and the coverage playing together. I think that’s why you saw up and down results. There were some games that were better than others, but it just didn’t happen consistently enough. I think that was definitely at the root of that inconsistency, just the lack of continuity with the players who were out there.”

**On WR Andre Roberts’ impact on the return phase:**

“I certainly felt like he came in there and gave us a lift. I felt like when he came in, we were really struggling to find it. I think what he did was he really solidified the professionalism in that position and gave us a real security blanket. I felt like, towards the end of the year, he was able to pop a couple of explosives in the kickoff return game, and that really helped us. I think that you saw the benefit of having a veteran returner who has lived it and who has accomplished so much. I felt like he definitely gave us a lift in that area. I’m glad we onboarded him because he definitely helped us win a bunch of games down the stretch and give us a chance to compete.”

**On ‘his approach to public scrutiny’:**

“I think that you understand the gravity of the job and the gravity of these decisions. I certainly don’t make these decisions lightly. I feel like we pour into the type of process that we have, and we believe in that. We know that each game is different, each situation is different. What we’re trying to do is give our team the best chance to win. I think that we’ve been transparent about our process and owning the mistakes, if they happen. Sometimes it’s not going to go down, but you can be proud of your process. I feel like we have an identity that we believe in. I feel like a lot of the decisions that are being second-guessed, some of those same decisions, they gave us a huge opportunity to be in the hunt. You can trace back a lot of those specific examples of those specific games where we won those games based off of that same thought process, based off of that decision-making process. I said that each of these decisions is going to have a life of its own and that’s how each game is in the NFL, and I truly believe that. I think that we demonstrated that throughout the season. We’re going to do the best that we can to make the best decisions that we feel like are going to give us the best chance to win. I don’t see that changing any time soon. I know that a lot has been made of this, but I really just feel like we’re trying to become the best football team that we can be and play to the strengths of our team. That’s really the philosophy of all of those decisions this year.

**On ‘if the scrutiny is a good thing because it means that people care’:**

“I think that any time you have that type of passion, that type of commitment, that’s what makes the NFL special. That’s what, hopefully, our fans — the Powder Blues — they recognize that this team is about something, that it means something. We’re trying to do our very best to win these games, not just compete in them, and that we believe in our guys, we believe in our players. I think that that’s something that expressed itself this year. I think if you talked to our players, that’s what they’re going to tell you. The last couple of days, for me, have been fantastic, to be able to reflect and connect with these guys about things like that. I’m very proud of the way that we did things this year and I look forward to growing, improving and building on it as we move forward.”

**On his 'overall message' to the team at the final meeting:**

"My message was that all endings are beginnings. I feel like this season was the end of something really special, and now it's the beginning of something special. You think of possibility, that's what happens when there's an ending; there's a possibility of something new. I told those guys that a year ago, we didn't even know one another. A year ago, I wasn't even the head coach yet. To look just within our facility, all the things that have changed just in our building, and then all the things that we've accomplished together, the season that we just had together, the way we competed, I think that these guys have a true belief system. I think that we've created something that's built to last. I think that it's going to get better with time. I think that what I was most proud of is the people that were in that team meeting — it was guys that had been with us from the beginning, there were guys that we on-boarded in training camp, midway through the season, but I think that all of them would tell you that they were really proud to be Chargers and that they loved competing together. I feel like that was on display the other night. We played with that type of competitive character that I think few teams play with. Now, we know where we need to go as a team and we're excited to get that beginning started."

**On his assessment of the run defense and potential improvements:**

"It was uneven, for sure. It definitely was a struggle for us, a fight. I would describe it as a fight for us because we played well at times, we played while in stretches, but it just wasn't quite consistent enough. It's a combination of all things; run defense is a product of playing team defense, it's not just a front issue or an edge issue or linebacker issue, it's a team, a defensive issue — you need all 11 guys to play run defense. If it comes down to a corner tackling, that impacts your run defense. That's what I try to convey to people. It's going to be all of those things. It's going to be personnel. We really believe in how we play. I think that it's getting the right people that fit that way the best that we can and then coaching our guys better, teaching our guys better, taking that ownership and that accountability. Then, really taking that to the grass in the springtime and being able to create the type of team that I know that we're going to be able to create. This year, that was just an aspect of our team that didn't happen well enough for us."

**On 'how successful the team was' in 'creating an offensive system for QB Justin Herbert':**

"That was the number one thing that we had to get right, to make sure that he improved as a player and that we fit our offense for him. I think that so much of that was the infrastructure that we were going to create around him. I think we invested upfront, as you guys are aware of, in free agency and in the draft. When you create an offense for someone, a big part of it is the structure for him. I feel like we were able to do that in Year 1 and really provide him with a supporting cast up front that would allow him to operate and be the player that he was capable of being because as a quarterback, it's hard to get started without a quality offensive line. We wanted to become a line of scrimmage team and I felt like we accomplished that on offense this season, joining up with [C] Corey Linsley, [G] Matt Feiler, [G] Oday Aboushi — we drafted [T] Rashawn [Slater] in the first round, an All-Pro tackle. I felt like we were able to get that right for Justin. Then, being able to create a system for him that not only featured his game but the game of our skill players, because it has to work hand in hand — you have to be able to create a system that works for [WR] Keenan [Allen], [WR] Mike [Williams], [WR] Joshua Palmer, [TE] Jared Cook and [RB] Austin Ekeler, maximizing your play-makers — and I feel like we were able to do both things; make sure that the strengths of Justin's game are featured and that it can grow in a sequence where you don't give him too much too soon, or you don't give him enough. We have a system that really challenged him, I talked about that. I felt like whether it was the way we played from the shotgun in the RPO game, getting him on the move in the keeper, play [-action] pass game — in terms of protections, how much we put on him, being able to onboard Corey Linsley to make sure that he was ready for that in time — I feel like what we did was we created a structure that allowed him to throw for 5,000 yards and set franchise records throwing the football, and being one of the elite players in the game. I feel like we had to get that right and I know that we got that right. I feel like he just improved so much as a player throughout the season. From the beginning of the springtime to that last game, where he improved as a player just are two different places. I'm so proud of him because of how much he invested in his game. I'm so proud of [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi], [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane [Day] and our offensive staff because it was a team effort. Justin was certainly at the center of it — and you guys all saw the other night and all season long — but it was because we had a team offense playing around. We had career years for so many guys and I think that speaks to what you talked about in creating a system for him."

**On how much of the focus will be placed on improving the defensive front this offseason:**

“Nowadays, I think it’s hugely important. It’s going to be the center of our thought process moving forward. I think that what you realize is that things have to happen in a sequence. You can’t do everything at once. I think that where myself, [General Manager] Tom [Telesco], [Owner and Chairman of the Board] Dean [Spanos] and [President of Football Operations] John [Spanos], where we’re all aligned is the vision that we have for that progress, for that plan. I think that what we were able to do in Year 1 was take care of what we felt like was the most important thing and the thing that we could control the most. I feel like we accomplished that. In one offseason, I really feel like, in that onboarding process in free agency and in the draft, I’m really proud of that process. How that unfolded within our team, I felt like that gave us a chance to compete and be a championship-type team, be a playoff-type team. We know where we are through 17 games of this season, and now where we have to go. There’s a lot of work to do and I’m really excited to get started on it.”

**On third-down defense and points allowed figures this season:**

“There are a lot out of factors into both of those things. Like I said, on third down, your pass defense is a reflection of pass rush and pass coverage. Third downs, what type of third downs are they? At the beginning of the season, we were excellent on third down and more than five [yards to go] when it was known-pass, and where we were not performing well was on the third-down one-to-two [yards to go], the area where it is more of a run situation. That was a product of the way that we were playing against the run. Then, in the second half of the season, I think on those longer third downs, we didn’t perform as well because our coverage were players certainly going in and out and we played against some really good teams with a lot of good skill and a lot of good quarterbacks. It was a fight all season long to find that consistency on that down and distance. Again, it needs to be much better moving forward and I know that it will be. I feel like that’s going to take place in time. Us being together, us being able to have another offseason, in a lot of different ways — of just our defense, and being able to onboard people and improve the people that we do have — it’s just going to be a much different-looking team in the springtime and I’m excited to get that work going.”

**On RB Austin Ekeler’s season:**

“Austin had 20 touchdowns this year. He had a career season. I’m really proud of how we maximized his role. We had a vision for how he was going to play. I feel like it was a fight to find that second and third back, and a lot of it had to do, in the run game, is who is offensive line and who are our tight ends blocking? I feel like once we got that sort of solidified in the second half of the season, knowing who the right side of our line was going to be, [TE] Tre’ McKitty’s emergence as a tight end in the run game, I feel like that all contributed to us being a much more consistently productive running team. I feel like that allowed us to be a complete offense in the second half of the season and it forced people to defend a lot more. That made us a lot more dangerous and a lot more prolific. I felt like we made a lot more improvements as we went. I’m definitely proud of how we finished the season, for sure.”

**On the benefit of developing relationships with his players:**

“I think the exit interviews over the last 48 hours — and there are still a couple of guys left, but really almost everyone’s gone — I think you know that you’re doing things the right way because your players are going to tell you the truth and you’re going to learn the most from them. I’ve know that I’ve certainly learned the most from the players in my career, no matter what level it’s been. The way we competed the other night and the way we competed throughout this season shows you that we have a special thing. The way that our team competed this year, and I feel like the way we performed, is something that fans and people throughout the league are going to respect. I think that that just shows you that these guys really love coming to work every day. They love coming to compete because they like who they’re doing it with and they like how we’re doing it. We just need to continue to elevate our standard. Those relationships, I think they allow you to stand the test of time and I think it allows you to work through a lot of the challenges that the NFL season has, and there’s a ton of them. We went through something really tough the other night and I think that we were able to overcome all of those obstacles throughout the season because of how close we were.”

**On 'the biggest area of improvement for him personally and the team' entering the offseason:**

"That's a long list. I just need to be a more complete coach in all phases. As I told you guys, I was doing a lot for the first time all the time. I feel like I learned so much this season; offense, defense, special teams, scheduling, training camp, offseason, you name it. There are just so many things that go into being a pro head football coach. I think that I've learned quickly. Going into the second year of it, I'm just a lot more certain of where I need to go with my game. I think that you have an idea of where you need to go when you become a head coach, but now you have a really strong picture of where you need to go with your game. I'm really proud of how we competed this year. For my first year, I know that I couldn't have tried any harder. I know that I gave everything I had to this team and to this role and responsibility, but I also know how much I can improve. That's where that fierce competitor in you is excited to get going. When you say that endings are beginnings, this is the beginning of me getting a lot better as a head coach."

**On CB Michael Davis' performance this season and areas of improvement entering the offseason:**

"I think just learning what it takes to become a complete DB. I think that when you're brand new with someone and you're in a new system, there's so much that you're learning all the time for the first time. I think the way we play is a lot different than he played before. From a technique standpoint, he's playing a lot more techniques than he's used to, whether it's playing bump-and-run, playing cushion-race, open-field tackling, being able to play in zone, pattern-match, key diagnose, crack-replace tackling — I think that there are so many areas to being a complete DB, playing the ball in and out of phase with his back to the ball. I think that is where his improvement is coming, knowing that it's not just one of those things, it's all of those things that need to happen so that he can become a complete player and play with the type of toughness, the type of discipline, the type of consistency in performance that a pro corner needs to have. I think that Vato is at the beginning, I said that you guys throughout the season, and I think he knows now, fully, where he needs to go with his game within our defense. I'm looking forward to attacking that with him this offseason."

**On 'if it is idiotic to say that the middle of the roster needs to be bolstered':**

"I certainly wouldn't say that 'I' word, I wouldn't agree with that. I don't think that there is any observation that is out of line. I would just say that talent, that word, is something that doesn't sit well with me because that's not what building a team is about. There's a difference between being a talented team and a championship team. The goal is to become a complete team, and that's where we're headed as an organization and where we have full alignment with Dean [Spanos], John [Spanos], Tom [Telesco], myself, our coaching staff, just becoming a complete team. There's a process to get there. This was our first year together and I think that we got a lot closer to becoming a complete team in one offseason together. Now, we have got to take advantage of this coming offseason because that's the challenge in the NFL and in all of sports, to be a complete team. We're working towards that. I'm excited to get going this 2022 season."

**On the 2021 rookie draft class:**

"I think that's a great observation. I'm really proud of our rookie class, guys. I think that, when you take a look at it, if you study the NFL draft and you look at every team who had a draft class — all of our drafted players were active on gameday this year. If you really take a look at that class and you dive deep into them, most of them had big roles on our team, whether it was a starter on special teams, a starter on offense or defense. I think when you take a look at our first pick in the draft, you're talking about an All-Pro left tackle in his rookie season. It's something that this team I know has been searching for a long time — what every team has been searching for a long time. The fact that we have that and for [T] Rashawn [Slater] to play like he did this year, I think that's such an incredible testament to your first year together. Then, for [CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.] to be a starting corner and play like he did, proving that he belongs. I think that, when you judge Asante, it's tough to start in the NFL at corner as a rookie. If you just take a look at last year's rookie class, you'll see that. For him to be a starting player, for him to be a player that we feel like we can build around, I think is a great start. Josh [WR Joshua Palmer], being able to fit in with [WR] Keenan [Allen] and [WR] Mike [Williams] and really take on a No. 2 receiver role, [No.] 3 receiver role depending on who was in — being able to play and be a starter in three-receiver groupings or two-receiver groupings when Mike or Keenan were out. I think he proves he belongs. I feel like, I'm just super proud of him on his work on special teams. Then, you have [OLB] Chris Rumph [II], [LB] Nick Niemann, [RB Larry] Rountree [III], [G/T Brenden] Jaimes, [DB] Mark Webb [Jr.] — all of those guys and then [TE] Tre' McKitty starting at tight end — all of those guys were contributors to our football. I'm really proud of that. I feel like our coaches did an outstanding job developing these guys. These guys are at the beginning. I think you can expect a lot of improvement from them this coming offseason because they definitely have the right makeup that we're looking for."

**On the offensive balance:**

“It was the right amount of [pass attempts] for this season. I know that, in terms of our personnel this year, it was the right amount. It was the right way to play based on this team. We felt like [QB] Justin [Herbert] throwing the football — now, listen, throwing the attempts is a relative number because how many of those were dropbacks and how many of those are RPOs, keepers. I think you have to factor in what type of passes they were, which is what we wanted to manage. What you want to do is manage the risk involved and you don’t want to live in that exclusive dropback world because you know that’s where a lot of the danger is in the NFL. I think that we did a really good job managing that. When you create a system for a young quarterback, you have to make sure that his security is the No. 1 thing that you’re thinking about. Yeah, you’re maximizing his strengths, but you know that you need to protect this guy. I feel like our guys did an excellent job navigating the waters of attrition on the O-line and tight end room. I felt like Justin was able to thrive as a passer because of it and showcase all that he’s made of. I felt like our passing game featured our players. We have a lot of really big-time players. We have two of the feature receivers in the league. They both had career years. [WR] Keenan [Allen] had 106 catches. [WR] Mike [Williams] had 76 catches, nine touchdowns. Those guys had career seasons, 15 touchdowns between them. You had Josh [WR Joshua Palmer] and [WR] Jalen [Guyton] play really good complementary roles. You maximized three tight ends to get you a lot of production. Then, your running back had 20 touchdowns, eight receiving. So, I feel like [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] and our offensive staff did a fantastic job maximizing this group. I’m so proud of our staff. I really feel like Justin’s play was just — it’s obviously at the lead of it all, but his improvement, I think, is what I’m most pleased with because his improvement really allowed him to feature all of those other guys.”

**On his relationship with General Manager Tom Telesco:**

“Tom has meant a lot to me since the moment I got here and the type of person he is. I think our partnership has grown every single day that we’ve been here. Just truly getting to know one another and truly being up-close and personal to our way of playing, our way of doing things, and creating something together, I think that’s always the key. I think in one offseason together that we’ve proven a lot together in terms of leading this football team. Now, there’s a lot of work to do, but I think that, just in terms of his character, his capacity and our togetherness with [Owner and Chairman of the Board] Dean [A. Spanos], [President of Football Operations] John [Spanos] and the Spanos Family — that’s certainly one of the highlights for me, is being able to work in that environment and to create a team that our fans can be proud of.”

**On the right side of the offensive line:**

“I think that what we proved is that those four guys that you mentioned — I think that we were able to hold the rope there. I think when you talk about that onboarding process of [T] Storm [Norton] game one after [T] Bryan [Bulaga] went down and then obviously [T] Trey Pipkins [III] playing there. Then, you start with [G] Oday [Aboushi] and then onboarding Scho [G/T Michael Schofield III]. Then, having [G/T] Brenden [Jaimes] and [G] Senio [Kelemete] kind of ready. I felt like what we did was what you have to do in the NFL sometimes, is when you meet that attrition that you figure it out. I felt like we were able to figure it out. I think that moving forward, what we’re going to do is create as much competition as we can and attack it the way we did on the other side of the line, which is try to create as many possibilities as possible. I think what’s really exciting for us is that those guys that you mentioned have proven themselves to be quality NFL players. When you’re trying to create a complete team, you have to have depth in order to make that happen. I think that what we did this year was at least create the depth that gave us an opportunity to be as successful as we were on offense.”

**On the attrition on defense:**

“I think what happened was that it happened in both places — it happened up front and in the secondary. Like on our offense, we had just the right side of our line and that was it. We didn’t have any, ‘Hey, our receivers are out and our O-line is out.’ It happened in a specific place, so you can plan for that. When it’s happening in both places, I think that it makes it challenging to be consistent. I think, again, when you talk about premium production — yeah, we weren’t, in terms of premium production, a top-five, top-10 unit. But in terms of being a unit that was able to play good enough defense against the best offenses we played, against the best quarterbacks that we played, yes we were able to give us a chance in those games. That’s sometimes the way it goes in this league. Sometimes, it just happens like that. Then, what’s incumbent upon you is to make sure that you’re always improving. That’s what we’re going to do this coming season. In terms of our defense, I felt like we hung tough this year. That’s what we had to do. We had to hang tough. I’m excited to continue to build and grow this group because I know we have the right stuff.”

**On exit interviews coaches and if there’s anticipated staff changes:**

“We’re at the beginning of that. We wanted to get through the roster first, through the players first and really take our time with those guys — having exit interviews with position coaches and myself. We were able to finish a lot of those yesterday. The rest of the week, we’ll be working through our staff. It’s always a special process to be able to connect with your people. We’ll just see where we go with the makeup with other things happening around the league.”

**On the time management of being a head coach that called the defense:**

“I think an offensive play-caller would tell you the same thing — anybody that calls plays on offense, whether it’s [Rams Head Coach] Sean [McVay], [49ers Head Coach] Kyle [Shanahan] or somebody like that. [Saints Head Coach] Sean Payton, you name an offense play-caller. Any time you’re the head coach and the play-caller, there’s going to be more that’s required of you, but I also think that brings out the best in you. I feel like if you asked our players, me being able to be in front of the team, me being able to create a blueprint every week, a schedule every week, communicate effectively to the full team, be connected to our game plan in all three phases and being able to talk to our offense in-depth about every part of the plan, the kicking game — I was able to do that. I feel like and to coordinate the defense at a high level the way that I’m used to coordinating it. I know that people are going to talk about our results here with the Chargers as compared to last year where I was at and other places, but I felt like I coordinated as well as I ever have in terms of planning, preparation and gameday. I feel like you have to look at that process over results. You’re always improving and that’s what is going to happen here in all phases. I feel like in managing both of those jobs that you’re talking about — being present with the team and coordinating the defense, I know I was able to do both at a high level and the best that I was capable of. I know that I’m going to improve a lot more in season two.”

**On using analytical data with gut instincts:**

“My instincts are what got me to this position. It’s what has gotten me to everywhere I’ve ever been as a competitor. Those are what I feel like are my best traits. I feel like when you’re making decisions, it’s both of those things. It’s your mind and your heart working together. I feel like that’s what I tried to do this year, was try to take all of the information that I had available — the actual data, the facts and then also look over to the other sideline, look on that field and understand that’s just as important. It’s going to impact you just as much. That’s what I tried to do the whole season. That’s why I tell you I’m proud of the way that we played. I know that I can improve, but I feel like for my first year as an NFL head coach. I feel like I wouldn’t change a lot, I know that. I’m proud of the people that helped me. I know that I’m going to improve as I go.”

**On his approach if assistant coaches are in the running for promotions with other teams:**

“It happened actually right when I got hired last year, [Packers Defensive Coordinator] Joe Barry was going to come here and then he ended up getting hired by the Packers as their defensive coordinator. I think your role as a leader is to help people achieve their dreams. I think that’s a big part of your responsibility, is being able to grow your people and being able to maximize their abilities. I feel like from a coaching standpoint that there are so many guys that did so much for me to help me here, including a lot of guys that are on this staff. I take a ton of pride for being able to advocate for our guys that are so deserving of opportunities. I felt like, last year being a coordinator, I was able to do that for those guys with the Rams. I think it’s a big part of my vision for being a leader, is being able to help these guys to their fullest potential. I fully expect other guys to want a lot of our coaches. They should. I can’t wait to discuss that with people when the time comes.”

**On penalties:**

“You want to play clean football. I think that you normally foul because of technique or ability. Most of it is technique because most of the guys that are in the NFL can play, but you have to play with good fundamentals. I think that, to me, that’s where the focus always has to be — on technique first and have a full command of your position. I think that’s something that when you see us play clean football this year, you can see how we play. You also have to know how things are being officiated and that flow of the game, too. I think that, in all three phases, we can improve, for sure. That’s a big part of your mission statement as a head coach is making sure that you give yourself a chance by not beating yourself. You want the penalties that do occur in the game to be aggressive penalties — flow of the game type of penalties. Not penalties that you could have controlled. Certainly, that’s going to be a point of emphasis for us, really every year that I’m here. I know that we’ll grow a lot from this season.”

**On how he’s feeling:**

“I think there’s a lot there to comment on. The finality of the NFL is part of the reason that makes it so amazing. It’s just how competitive it is. That feeling when it’s over, however it goes, whether you’re the last one standing or it was like for us the other night, is when you put your entire self into something, when it’s over, there’s a feeling that’s hard to explain. When you’re a competitor and you don’t win, to me it’s always the same in terms of the emptiness. That’s just the way to describe it, is emptiness. But, what perspective does, is it fills you back up. You acknowledge all of the beautiful things, all of the big-time things that happened because, certainly as a head coach, both things happen at the same time. We lost a tight game, but man, the way that we played, the way we came back in that game, the type of team that we showed that we are, there’s so much to draw from. This season, you just hate that you’re not still playing because you feel like you have a team that can beat anybody. You beat five playoff teams and now you’re not one of the 14 in the tournament. It’s hard to process that, but then I think, like I said, you have to realize that all endings are beginnings. You have to cherish the people that you just spent six months with. You need to celebrate them, treat them with the respect that they’ve earned and then shift your focus to what’s next and move them forward. That’s what I’ve tried to do with this team. There’s so much to be excited about. There’s too much to be excited about to just focus on what happened on Sunday night. Where my focus is, is where this team can go and be really proud of where we just went. I think that both of those things are true at the same time. You know where you need to go and you know you need to get going. I’m excited to do that.”

**On special teams:**

“I think it’s a lot like on defense, it’s a work-in-progress. I think that there was progress made. I think there’s a lot of work to do in terms of being a consistent team and being the type of team that we expect to be. I think, like you said, a lot of it is teaching and development, getting people in the right roles, establishing the depth that you need on teams in order to be successful. I think that it’s a work-in-progress. I think that we definitely made improvements in trying to create a culture there, but there is a lot of work to do.”

**On bringing in players that fit the defensive scheme:**

“I think every offseason is a big opportunity. I think last year when I got here, that was kind of the feeling on offense. I think that we were able to attack that accordingly. I think that the way it shaped this year, there’s more of that on defense, but I really think that it’s the quality of who you onboard regardless of what side of the ball it’s on. I think what we have to be able to do is onboard the type of player that we need in order to become the team we’re capable of being. I think that’s certainly a long process that starts here after the Super Bowl. As you saw this year, it happens in a lot of different stages with free agency, trades, the draft, during your season. There’s just so many different ways that it happens. That’s probably what I learned, is that, man, it’s a process to get there. I think, on defense, certainly we have an opportunity and we’re going to need to.”



**On WR Mike Williams:**

"I think Mike proved himself in a big way. I think the other night was kind of an expression of his season. I think what he proved to the league and to you guys is that he's a complete receiver. I think he was predominantly used outside the red line [before], but now being able to run the full tree, outside and inside, run after the catch on top of all of the things that you guys are accustomed to seeing outside the red line, I think he was just able to showcase himself in a bigger way. He scored the ball, which I think is a strength of his. Some receivers don't do that. They don't score the ball. That's what he did this season for us — nine touchdowns, but he also had 76 catches, which was a career-best by almost double. I think what he showed was that he's a tough cover in a lot of different places. What I also think he showed was the durability that's also important. I feel like being available for [QB] Justin [Herbert] and being able to grow with Justin — I think that chemistry really was on display this season because of that. That's also an important factor in being a pro player. Seeing Mike Williams in our locker room after that game, guys, that's the thing that you're not going to forget is the way that look on his face — he didn't have anything left. The way he played, it's a performance I'm not going to forget. He was hurting. He went back in that game and he brought us back. I'm really proud of the season that he had."

**On DL Jerry Tillery:**

"I think he improved throughout the season. I feel like after the bye, he really made a big jump as a player. I feel like becoming a complete player is something that he understands a lot better. I think we had a conversation a couple of weeks ago about truly understanding his identity as a player. I think, when you truly understand who you are as a player, sometimes that's a process, 'This is who I am,' because that tells you where you need to go. I think he knows now where he is with us, with me. I think this offseason, he's going to be able to take his game where it needs to go. Where, last year when you're brand new, you haven't been with me. You haven't been in our defense. You haven't been in our scheme. What I thought I needed to do before is not what I need to do now. Some of it is, but then some of it's not. I think he's just a lot more confident in who he is and where he needs to go. I think he was a productive player for us this season. I thought he played well the other night. I think that, now, it's that consistency of performance in terms of his technique because this guy plays really hard — his consistency of his assignment. That comes with time on task. I think having a full offseason together is going to be significant. I really like coaching him. I would expect him to improve in a big way this offseason."

**On the integration of the defensive scheme to this team:**

"I think it's just a different collection of players. I think it's a different collection of experiences. I think that, for us this season, being the first year some place, you're really just trying to have that discovery process with your guys. I think that where I was last year, we really had consistency of who those players were week-in and week-out. If you take a look back at that team that I coached last year, those same guys were there the entire season. We were fortunate that way. In Chicago, it was that way. In Denver, when I was with [former Broncos Head Coach] Vic [Fangio] in 2019, we had similar attrition in the secondary, but it was just the secondary. I think, this year, the tough part for us was that we never — we didn't play together very much. Then, inside up front, those guys didn't play together very much. It was just a different cast all the time. It's hard to play team defense when you're brand new all the time. That's just the facts. I think we're going to get a lot better as we go. We're going to improve technique, scheme. I'm going to improve a lot as a coach. We're going to onboard new guys and we're going to get a lot better as we move forward."