

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 Week 9 Media Availability

Friday, November 5, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On if it is ‘an unfair burden to expect 350 yards passing’ out of QB Justin Herbert each game:

“I don’t think it’s an unfair burden because he is capable of it. That’s where I stand with it. He’s set a remarkable standard because he has accomplished a lot and he is capable of a lot. I think that when you see something like that in sports, or in any other profession like it, you come to expect it, once you’ve seen it over and over and over. He hasn’t just done it a couple of times; he’s done it a bunch so far in his young career. He has certainly set a high standard for himself. With that standard comes the question of consistency and performance. What he has proven is that he is a consistent performer. I think that is what is so remarkable about the start to his career. He has proven that he is a consistently top-tier player in this league. At the same time, with those expectations also comes the reality of being brand new to the league. You have that super standard of performance, but you also have to understand that there is also a journey that you’re going on. I think that is where the competitor in you has to take each game as a big-time learning experience, whether it goes the way you want or not. After the last two games, that we have had, I think that Justin has learned a lot. What he goes back out there and does is what he always does, whether it was a 400-yard performance or a tough performance, he goes out there, grows from it and learns from it. That’s what you want. I think the thing about him, and other players like him, is that you have to take ownership of your game. That’s what he does such a good job of. I think that’s where he is at so far in his career.”

On depth at cornerback:

“It’s such an important point of when you go down a couple of guys, how to you respond? I think that [Secondary Coach] Derrick Ansley, [Assistant Secondary Coach] Tommy Donatell, [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo [Hill] — that whole group of guys does such a good job of cross-training these guys. These guys have game action. They’ve been in the fire, whether it was in the preseason or this season. [CB] Kemon [Hall] was out there in the Kansas City game, playing for us when [CB] Chris [Harris Jr.] was down. T.C. [CB Tevaughn Campbell] played most of that game, starting at Star. He has also played outside for us. All of those guys have had meaningful experience. [CB] Ryan [Smith] has played in this league, too. I think that experience helps. It’s going to be all hands on deck on Sunday. I like the way that we have practiced so far this week with that group. I’m really confident in those guys as competitors. We’re going to have to do a good job of playing and coaching around them. Those guys are going to be up for the challenge.”

On if Harris will play inside or outside:

“I think a little bit of both. I think in five DB groupings, you can expect him inside, and then in four DB groupings, he will definitely be a factor for us at outside corner. It’s such a luxury to have guys like Chris and [S] Derwin [James Jr.] that can provide you with even more depth. That’s something that we really value in the secondary. That’s why we value it. You’re going to have games where you do get banged up and you have to be able to withstand it. I’m excited to see that group compete together. They’ve practiced well.”

On if the 'shuffling' of players in the secondary can impact special teams:

"Such an important point. We're going to have some activations tomorrow that are reflective of that issue that you're talking about. They're great opportunities for other players to compete and show what they can do. That's why, on special teams, you also have to have a system that is flexible because you're going to endure games like this one where guys have to move around. Guys that were probably primary special teams players have to have primary roles on defense, which affects their job on special teams. We're going to have that same cross-training action tomorrow on special teams. We're going to get to see where we're at, for sure. I'm excited to see that, though, because that's what the NFL is about and that is the type of team that we need to be."

On S Alohi Gilman's injury:

"I happened in the game. It's just one of those things. In the game, with adrenaline, you're able to get through it. But, after the game, you're feeling much different than you did when it was live. We just want to be smart with him. He has competed hard this week — hit rehab hard — but we just want to make sure that we are smart with him. He will be more of a game-time decision for Sunday."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.:

"I'm excited about where K9 is at. He has practiced well. Again, it's one of those things where we are going to try and take advantage of that window and make sure that when he comes back, he's ready — much like Ryan Smith, just making sure that this guy is ready to go. It's one thing to be maybe physically cleared to go, but have you practiced enough? Are you in the gameplan? Stuff like that. He's trending really positively. We're excited to get him back."

On Eagles QB Jalen Hurts:

"Jalen Hurts is a winner. Jalen Hurts is a competitor. He's a playmaker at the quarterback position. He makes plays. He makes first downs. My high school coach, Bob Ritley, he said, 'Your number one job, Brandon, is to move the chains. That's your number one job, to move the chains and to protect the football.' I think that he does both of those things. He can bring his team back. The Tampa Bay game is a good example of it. Carolina is a good example of it. He has always been able to do that, wherever he has been, whether in high school in Texas — he was a coach's son, a great player. Going to Alabama, going to Oklahoma, he did the same thing wherever he has been. He makes plays. He can bring you back. He is a guy that has a lot of confidence in his ability. You can see that team starting to find out how to use him best. I have a lot of respect for him as a competitor, for sure."

On RBs Joshua Kelley and Larry Rountree III:

"I think that both of them are going to be in the gameplan. Both of them have strengths. Larry's contributions on special teams is important for us. He is a guy that has carved out a nice role for himself. Then, in terms of just running the ball, so much of it is the type of runs that we're using, and also pass protection within the gameplan — who do we trust to protect the passer? I think those guys are competing nicely. We're just going to see where it goes. I felt like J.J. [RB Justin Jackson] really emerged last week as a guy, in practice and in the ball game, that we really felt confident in, in that number two role. But, then, with the setback, we're just going to keep that competition open."

On if each rookie's playing time is based on a case-by-case basis:

“We’re excited about this rookie class. [OLB] Chris Rumph [II] has been a major factor for us this year on special teams, and he’s been in the [defensive] rotation. [LB] Nick Neimann, same way — special teams, and has played linebacker in some games. Those guys have been out there. They’ve kind of been out there in the fire. [WR] Josh [Palmer] has been out there. His role, I think, is still evolving, and it’s still growing. I think that he has proven that he can make NFL plays out there, which we’re excited about. [TE] Tre’ McKitty, his is an example of making sure that he was ready to play, more physically than mentally. Physically, now he has shown that he’s ready to play. Mentally, he’s ready to play. That’s why I kind of talk about every timeline being different for a young player. I think Tre’ had a nice first game last week. We’re excited to see how he plays this week. I think the same thing for [DB] Mark Webb [Jr.]. Mark Webb has been in there for us. He’s been doing a really good job. I think that his role is going to continue to evolve because he looks like a pro secondary player, and a guy that should be a big factor on special teams. I think that was a really good pick for us. I’m excited to keep coaching him. Larry has had a role every game. What I’m excited about is that we’re getting contributions from everybody. [G/T] Brendan [Jaimes], as a rookie offensive lineman, in that role, it was a big step from last week being active in the game and being ready for the game. I think that growth and development, [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach] Frank Smith and [Assistant Offensive Line Coach] Shaun [Sarrett], are doing such a good job with those guys. [Tight Ends Coach] Kevin Koger with Tre’ McKitty. I feel like that’s such a big part of the NFL; development. The best way to develop is to get out there. What we want to make sure is that we get them out there when they’re ready. Then, when we put them out there, we’re going to be ready for them to make some mistakes because that’s just part of being a young player. But, I believe in getting them out there. That’s what you’re seeing, phasing these guys in in the right time. Then, getting them out there so that they can really grow. I’m proud of these guys. These guys have all done well. Don’t leave off [LB] Amen [Ogbongbemiga], as an undrafted guy who has gone out there and played exceptionally well for us. We’ve had some undrafted guys do really well for us, too. We’re proud of that class. They’re going to continue to grow for us.”

On last week's punt coverage performance and how that ranked compared to prior games this season:

“[Ravens WR Devin] Duvernay had a good game against us, as well. The punt location is part of it. It’s not just a gunner issue or an interior core issue; it’s a team issue. I think that both of those games, from Baltimore’s plan of attack versus New England, they were different gameplans. What I think expressed itself is that our entire coverage team has to be more connected in terms of how teams are playing us. Then, this is who needs to win if they match us up like this. This is where the ball needs to go, if they’re matching us up like this. Everybody tied in together. Punt is a defensive play after the ball is turned over. It’s those 11 guys playing team defense together. I think it’s just us being connected. I know that [Special Teams Coordinator] Derius [Swinton II] and [Assistant Special Teams Coach] Mayur [Chaudhari] are working hard with that group. There are a lot of young guys on that group who are going to learn a lot. Both of those special teams units, when I talk about the truth and stuff like that, I think both of those teams told the truth about where we need to go as a punt unit.”

On if ‘growing pains’ are ‘expected’ with punt coverage, based on the experience of the players on the unit:

“I think that we have high expectations. If they go out there as punt starters, they’re starters in the NFL just like everybody else. So, we’re going to hold them to that high standard. I think that there is also the realistic expectations that you’re going to have some tough moments, but what we have to do is minimize them. Being able to really learn quickly, you have to learn quickly on the job. I don’t think it’s a talent issue at all, which is exciting. It would be one problem if we didn’t feel like we had good enough players out there, but we know that we have good enough players. What we need to do is continue to accelerate that growth through practice, post-practice, pre-practice. Just keep that positive trend in terms of the preparation. Then, I know that good results will happen.”

SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR DERIUS SWINTON II

On K Dustin Hopkins:

"He's really good on his kickoffs — distance, direction, hang [time]. And the field goals, he made them all. He had the big kick at the end to give us a chance with the PAT to get the onside kick. And then the 48-yarder was good. But I think he's really good. New operation, a new stadium, all the things he had to adjust to, and he felt good. For a veteran, you could really feel his presence; there was a calm in his presence as he goes on the field. The kickoff team is young, and just comes in and says, 'Alright, I'm going to kick it here, guys.' It's a good presence to have, he had a good week."

On onside kicks:

"It's tough for the return team because they have less guys. But you also have to execute a kick that is a rarity that you don't practice a lot. You just can't, time-wise. The numbers say you're going to have an onside kick — unless you're a team that's not winning a lot of games, you're not going to have an onside kick more than once or twice a season, so you don't put that much time when you do practice. You just have to be ready to execute, that's what gave us the chance. But it is hard on the return team. If you look at it, they came and blocked us, but we had things free — the high hop. But it's a tough play either way. But we had them outnumbered because of what the numbers say. And that's just around the league, you see it. People have you outnumbered, but it comes down to if your ball guy or the front-line guy make the play. They put in favor of the kickoff team, but it's still a hard play because you don't practice it a lot. It's one of those things you can't invest so much time in because you don't really see it unless you're losing a lot of games at the end."

On the probability of winning an onside kick over a Hail Mary:

"It's higher than a Hail Mary, just distance-wise and what has to happen. But it has to be executed with such fine detail. The kick has to be perfect, and then when you look at the kick, it's not usually in the air. It's hitting the ground — as the year goes on, it's grass and then you have turf. It's not an always thing because of all the variables. Does a player come up and block? Does it hit him? If you look at ours, it almost hit the guy in the leg, but it doesn't, it high hops. [S] Alohi [Gilman] is on the outside, we're trying to get the twist. It's just so many variables. If you look at the league, I think I've seen one or two recovered this year, but it's a tough thing percentagewise. And you have to look scheme-wise, because they have less. Are you overloading one side? You can't do numbers-wise, five and five, but are they going to play one side or the other? What kicks can your kicker execute? It's so many variables, but I will say it's probably higher than a Hail Mary. But it's a tough play and how much time you invest in it is like how often the offense and defense spent time during the week on a Hail Mary. I was part of one in Arizona last year, it's one of those rare things. You can coach it up perfectly, but it's the time, investment, and reps."

On the punt coverage:

"It's one thing, leverage-wise. We got out-leveraged on the left side a few times — get the guy outside. But it wasn't a talent thing, we had guys rallying to the ball. [LB] Drue [Tranquill] and [TE] Stephen [Anderson] rallied to the ball. One time, the punt location was great. And the thing about punts is after you protect, the punt has to be in the right location, the guys have to cover right leverage. Against a good team like that where you have guys that have done this for a long time, you give them an inch and they take a mile. Their [Patriots] punt returner [Gunner Olszewski] is really good, he saw the edge, and that's what happens. These guys are going to learn these things as they go through the league. You look at our left side and you see three young guys and they're learning those lessons. You look at [LB] Nick Niemann, [S] Alohi [Gilman], [OLB] Chris Rumph [II] — they're going against real-life NFL starters. [Patriots OLB] Matthew Judon gets paid a living to rush passers, and he's rushing a rookie out of Iowa. Through the game, he's trying to figure them out. He gets one time, he gets bowled. Next time, he cuts them — does a great job. Next time he gives them another move, and he holds them up a little bit. It affects the coverage as well. People look at the coverage, but it's how did the interior guys get out in the coverage? If they're getting held up by true NFL starters, they have to learn how to get through it. I think that was a good they that they came out of the week saying, 'Alright, now I've learned how to shed these big players so I can get out in the coverage. Now, we get out and let's just be in the right spot, as far as our leverage goes.' It's a rough outing. It happens with a young team; but I think how they saw it moving forward is they can play with these guys. It's just a matter of learning little things that rookies don't have. It's rookie things that we'll go through and luckily, we were able to rally to it. You look back on it and you say, 'That was a rough, 20-something yard return.' But you look at it last year, and he had four touchdowns. You look at the positive. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley says the same thing, 'Always try

to look at the positives. Hey, it wasn't great. But we learned from it, but we didn't give up a touchdown. Now, let's make sure this doesn't happen again."

On the performance of the interior:

"We talked about when they're singling the gunners, they're probably rushing us inside. The gunners probably win because they're in single. And the gunners know when we're getting viced, our expectation is for you to keep leverage. But we're not really expecting you, with two guys on you, to make the tackle. But leverage is key because then the interior guys who have less guys on them end up making the play. We did a great job on [CB] Kemon's [Hall] when he squirted out — he beat both those guys. He was there at the point of tackle, one-on-one. And we talked about how it's beating the one-on-one and how you do that. Because you know where the ball's punted. We went through the game, and it was like, 'Hey, we've made these plays against vice. We've made these plays in single. And now with interior, with the third punt — [LS] Matt Overton, we squeeze him in — it's a small return.' It's just carrying over play-by-play. As a rookie, it's about locking into every play, being in the right spot on every play. In this league, you can't take a play off. I think that's part of maturing as a unit. Our core guys are really, really young, and we were going through and adding the years at the end of the game. I said, 'Man, you look at [Patriots WR Matthew] Slater, he's got 15-plus. You look at [Patriots S] Cody Davis, he's done this for a living. You look at [Patriots RB Brandon] Bolden, he's done this for a living.' And we look ourselves and it's game seven. So, you have to be tough on them, and how [Head] Coach [Brandon Staley] said, we hold them to a high standard. But then we look back and we say, 'Guys, listen. You just went through murderer's row against special teams opponents.' [Browns Special Teams Coordinator Mike] Preifer has been in Cleveland, he's been in Minnesota — he's worked a long time with his core guys. In Baltimore, those guys have done that for a living. And then in New England, [WR] Matthew Slater should have co-coordinator has his title. You're going to learn from this and we're going to be better. Your day's going to come where you're doing this to young guys. We just have to take our lumps, we have to keep being positive, and I think that's what we did. And it's tough because we all want to win, we all want to dominate. But you tip your cap to those guys, they've done it for a long time, and we'll learn from it."

On WR Kemon Hall's penalty:

"I told him, 'I can't yell and scream at you.' He saw the guy and he's supposed to keep leverage. [Patriots WR] Gunner [Olszewski] was coming up and Kemon plans to make a cut to get back outside and his arm just goes out. He wasn't trying to grab him. He wasn't trying to grab him to tackle him because he knew the ball wasn't there. When we watched the film, he plants it and then he changes direction, and his arm just gets him. I go, 'I get it, it's one of those things as a coach. You say that's a penalty.' He wasn't going to make the tackle. I could see if he went at him, but he was changing direction to get back outside, and his arm hit someone. It's a tough play."

On the punt that was placed in the wrong location:

"We were trying to go directional, and it was in the middle of the field. We can get into the math of how it's a triangle and when it's in the middle of the field, the gunners have a longer way to go. Then, the interior has more field to cover. We're trying to limit the field; you see us on kickoff trying to do the same thing. Most teams do. When it's in the middle, it's just so much more space for the return unit, and you don't have hard edges; especially when they go six-spot, double-vice. Our gunners are trying to get leverage and it's a hard thing. [P] Ty [Long] knew it, location-wise. But we still have to cover that thing, leverage it, and make the tackle. Looking at this week, it'll be fun going against a group that's — age-wise — right there with us. We match up well with them. I think we'll come out and perform well. The guys were really focused during the week, a really good week of practice. Hopefully it turns out the right way."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On his hand:

“It’s doing well, thank you.

“I would have to look back at [when I hit it in the game]. I can’t remember quite when it happened.

“It was just one of those weird things where you look down and it didn’t feel quite right, but it has been good and had a good week of practice. No issues since.”

On hitting his hand on a helmet in Week 3 at Kansas City and if there was any ‘relation’ to Sunday’s game against New England:

“Shoot, that was so long ago. I can’t quite even remember the Chiefs one. I just hit it on a helmet and it has recovered since then. It’s been good.”

On the Eagles defense:

“They have a really great front-seven. They rush the passer very well. They disrupt the quarterback and they’ve done a great job of stopping the run, as well. They have some really good cover guys, too. It’s a full team on defense. It requires us to have a good week of practice and preparation so that we have a chance on Sunday.”

On the last couple of games:

“As tough as it may be, there was a lot of good film to watch. You have to get better and, thankfully, it’s a long season. We’re not going to let two games get us down. It’s all about coming back and handling adversity. I think that guys have done a great job of handling that this week and showing with their practice and giving their best effort. It might not go our way, but that’s what’s going to happen. That’s NFL football. I think we’ve done a great job of responding to that, so I’m really excited to see what we can do.”

On improving with experience:

“That’s a great question. I think playing quarterback, especially being in the NFL, it’s all about getting better. There are going to be times where I make a lot of mistakes, throw interceptions and incompletions. You don’t want to do that. You don’t have to go through that, but it’s going to happen. To learn from those — and hopefully you don’t make the same mistake twice. That’s what [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day and I talk about all the time. Obviously, it’s not going to go your way [all the time]. Adversity is going to happen. It’s all about how you react to it. Kind of like I mentioned, I think the guys have done a great job responding to it. It’s a long NFL season. If you let one team beat you again, you’re going to have a tough season. It’s all about bouncing back and attacking each week as they come.”

On similarities between the Eagles and Chargers defense:

“I think it is a huge benefit being able to see, kind of, the similarities between the two. They have some different personnel. That front-seven that they have is really impressive, like I mentioned earlier. They’ve done a great job of disrupting the passer and getting a pass-rush. All of the team that you’ve seen them play, they’ve done a good job of getting to the passer. We’ve had to have a good week of preparation — the protection plan, seeing coverages on film. Like I said, they’re an impressive defense.”

On taking deep shots while taking what the defense gives:

“The checkdown is a second option. That’s the last resort option. You’re going to do everything you can to push the ball down the field, but if everything is covered, you find your checkdown and try to get four or five yards. That’s one of the things about playing quarterback, is being able to see these guys get depth. If they’re all covered, instead of throwing it away or getting sacked, throw the ball to the running back and let him make something happen.”

On defenses trying to take the deep ball away:

"I think they've done a good job of, kind of, putting a roof over it. I think we need to do a better job of executing. There are definitely options there. That's, when you watch the film the following day, when you say, 'I could have hit this guy. I could have put it here.' I feel like it's up to us to execute better. We're doing a good job of seeing what they're bringing, doing that and protecting it. It's all about executing and all being on the same page — [WR] Keenan [Allen], [WR] Mike [Williams], [WR] Jalen [Guyton] — but I trust those guys completely. I know we're going to keep putting in the work so that we are there, whenever that may happen."

On running the football on the road:

"I think that depends on each individual game plan. If we have to throw the ball 50 times or have to run the ball 60 times, that's what we're going to have to do. You kind of have to scout and game plan the other team. The coaches have done a great job of working all week and providing us with a game plan. Whatever that may be on Sunday, we're going to do our best to follow it."

On his confidence level:

"No [it's not shaken]. Obviously, I don't want to make mistakes, but it's going to happen. It's all about how you react. I can look back to high school and college, throwing picks and losing games. If you don't learn from those, you don't get any better. I think going through those mistakes, as unfortunate as they are, you have to learn from them. We have a great coaching staff who have helped me look through those and watch the film. It might be a tough film session watching those mistakes, but it's going to help you in the long run. The guys, the coaching staff, they all believe in one another. It's been a great process so far, learning."

On taking a sack on a second-and-one play against New England:

"I got lost behind the offensive line. They had three guys right in front of me and I couldn't see Keenan [Allen], I couldn't see the defenders. I could have thrown it to him. Watching the film, as painful as it is, I could have hit him, but I didn't see the defenders and I didn't want to force something downfield. I thought I could get back to the checkdown. It got covered up. Unfortunately, you have to throw that away. It's one of those things that you have to learn from."

"It's huge, you have to be able to see the defender. One of the things that [Texans Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Pep Hamilton taught me last year was no late throws over the middle. I kind of considered that a late throw over the middle. I couldn't see the defender. I didn't want to force anything downfield. I have to find a way to step up in the pocket and see him because he was open. I have to be able to hit him."

On facing pocket pressure:

"I think we've done a good job of finding our guys and finding checkdowns. We've been able to move the ball. It's unfortunate that we've turned the ball over a couple of times, but that's a learning process that you have to learn through and go through. I've thought very highly of our receivers, running backs and tight ends making plays and getting up the field. I think they've done an incredible job."

On seeing Patriots TE Hunter Henry last week and Eagles Offensive Coordinator Shane Steichen this week:

"It's really cool. I'm huge fans of those guys. I was a big fan of Hunter Henry before I got here and became an even bigger one after I met him. He's one of those guys that I'm going to cheer for and root for as long as he's playing. Hopefully, we have that connection for many years to come. Same thing with Shane Steichen. We got super close last year. It's unfortunate when a coaching staff has to move on, but I'm going to support him and be there for him for years to come, too."

On if he couldn't see the defenders that might have been covering WR Keenan Allen on the play referenced earlier against New England:

"Correct, yeah. I was behind the offensive line. I couldn't see Keenan or the defenders. I didn't know what was open. I tried to find the checkdown, but couldn't."