

## Chargers Media Availability

Monday, December 19, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On an update regarding OLB Joey Bosa's return from injury:**

"No update on Joey [Bosa]. We'll let you guys know as soon as we feel like he's going to be at practice. We'll make that announcement so that you guys are prepared."

#### **On an update regarding S Derwin James Jr.'s recovery process:**

"He's progressing. We are hoping to see him back in practice at some point this week. With the extra day, we're going to make sure that we take full advantage of it, but I still consider him day-to-day. He's feeling better, for sure. If you were able to see him work out pregame, he is trending in the right direction."

#### **On additional injury updates following yesterday's game:**

"[RB] Austin [Ekeler], his MRI was negative on that shoulder. He's fine. [WR] Joshua [Palmer] is fine, too. His back, he had kind of a weird landing there, but he's fine. The only two injuries from the game to report are that [DL] Joe Gaziano has a groin injury, and the nature of that is weeks not days, and then [CB] Kemon Hall has a hamstring injury, and he is week-to-week with that."

#### **On the offense's performance yesterday following film evaluation this morning:**

"I think it is what I saw on the field, what I said to you guys after the game. I thought that there were a lot of good plays in the game. I thought that we ran the ball effectively at times in the game, particularly down in the red zone. I thought our short-yardage runs were good, which I liked. I felt like we had some untimely, negative plays that took us out of rhythm, whether it was a penalty or a sack. Then, we had a couple of third-down conversions that, I think, we normally make, that we didn't make yesterday. Obviously, the big one that would have gone for 26 yards on third-and-three. There just wasn't that great synergy yesterday. There were a lot of good plays in there, but then, there were some plays that definitely inhibited our progress. That's why you only score 17 points."

#### **On 'any consideration' to consider the incomplete pass to WR Keenan Allen on third-and-three in the second quarter:**

"I saw it that way. I had a pretty good look at it. I felt like it would be difficult to overturn that ruling based on the movement of the football. That's kind of been the tagline towards catch or no-catch, that movement of the football and controlling it to the ground. I didn't feel like it was worthy [of a challenge]. We were thinking about it, but I didn't think that it was worth it to challenge."

**On the defense's ability to 'perform at a high level' without James Jr. and the 'expectation for the defense' upon his return:**

"We expect to play better with one of the top players in the league out there. I think that that will be a great infusion of leadership, production and energy. I think what it has really allowed us to do is take a good look at some guys in some leading roles. In these last couple of games, you've been able to see [DB] Ja'Sir Taylor out there playing, you've been able to see [S] Nasir [Adderley] and [S] Alohi [Gilman] in different roles than they normally play for us. I think that has been good. I think that we've been able to take a look at guys like [S] Raheem Layne and really see what he can do for us in some roles. Then, how we've had to play in sub [-personnel] defenses. I think that it has been good for our football team to be able to play without him, as you guys know. He had kind of a quarterback record thing going with him, one of the few defensive players that when he is not in the game, we don't have a very good record without him. Our record got a little bit better, which, I think, is a good sign for our football team. I kind of ambushed him with this the other day, kind of caught him off guard — this was after the Miami game — I was like, 'We did something the other night that was amazing,' and he thought that I was going to say something completely different, but I was like, 'We won without you [*laughter*].' That's a good sign that we are able to do that, that we're deep enough to get it done — and not just win without him, but play really well. He deserves so much credit in that because of how he has energized this group and how he prepares them. You saw him at the game yesterday energizing these guys, and the offense, too. It's important for us to play for him. I feel like that's been something that our defensive backfield has done, and our defense, in general, is playing really hard for him. When we get him back, we're going to be that much better. What I said in the press conference yesterday, after the game, I really meant. With guys having to step up into leading roles, it has really brought out the best in them. I think that that has been the case the last couple of weeks."

**On how he, personally, has been able to 'navigate the roller coaster of the season':**

"Belief in myself. Belief in the people that you're with every day; the coaches, the players, our organization. I trust the people that we're with every day. As a competitor, you're always improving. Something I pride myself in is being able to figure it out when things happen, that's kind of what you have to do in the NFL. You have to be able to figure things out, you have to keep a level-head on your shoulders, you have to stay poised. Then, you have to be yourself. You can't become someone you're not when either it's going well or it's not, but, certainly when you're in the midst of that middle stretch there, that you guys are all aware, which was really challenging. I just think that that's when you reveal who you are. I want everyone to be able to look back and say, 'Hey, he's the same guy that he was the first day he walked in here, just he's better,' hopefully. I have a lot of faith in myself, a lot of confidence in myself. I know that every day I'm just trying to get better and I'm trying to make the improvements that I need to make in my own game so that I can be as good as I can be for everybody here."

**On if the defense 'is hitting their stride':**

"One thing that I've liked about the last two weeks — and you guys know this about me from way back when — I feel like you have to be able to match up with a lot of different styles in the league. I think your defense has to be able to carry itself to these new weeks. Miami and Tennessee could not be more different, but your defense has to be able to change and still perform at a high level. I think that I've been able to see more of that. The San Francisco game. I loved that plan. I thought that our defense was fantastic in that game. Kansas City, our guys were on top of it until that last drive. I really felt like they gave us a chance in that game. I think that we've really made some good strides here. The last two weeks, in particular, I've probably felt more energy from the group for the whole game than at any other point since I've been here. I think that you've seen more play-making and us playing the game the way it needs to be played. That's what we need to build on because we have practiced well and we have played how we practice."

**On the 'increased energy from the defense':**

"I touched on a little bit after the game, but I think that it's hard to have maximum energy when you're going through so much zig-zag, so much in-and-out, so much stuff. It's hard to have that full tank when a lot is going down. We've just had a little bit less of that. We have a little bit more certainty, in terms of who we're playing with, who we've been practicing with. I think our guys are comfortable in their roles and they're comfortable in the gameplan. You're seeing that full game being played, that complete performance. I think that that's where the explanation lies, to be honest with you. I think that you saw signs of it after the bye, and I think that it was starting to build. But, I think the last two weeks, it has really come alive for us."

**On 'general clock management' and taking timeouts with less than a minute remaining in regulation with the Titans driving to preserve enough time for the offense's eventual game-winning drive:**

"I think that your mindset has to go from defensive coordinator to head coach in that sequence. You know that you're trying to get them stopped, for sure, managing the two-minute the best that you can, but then, you're also having to manage the potential two-minute drill for your offense at the same time. I have a great team around me [Director of Football Research] Aditya Krishnan and [Pass Game Specialist] Tom Arth are up in the box helping me. They do such a fantastic job. Then, [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo Hill, [Special Teams Coordinator] Ryan Ficken and [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi], us all being together about how we want to operate at the end of the game. When they hit that pass to 85 [Titans TE Chig Okonkwo], we knew that there was going to be a component where we had to start to think like that. That's when we clicked into that mindset. It was trying to get him stopped, but then also to give Justin [Herbert] and our offense an opportunity for a two-minute drill, possibly."

**On if he thought that Tennessee would attempt a two-point conversion following the touchdown:**

"I thought that it was certainly a possibility, yes."

**On the value of OLB Chris Rumph's sack on third-down to force a longer field goal attempt, which was ultimately missed by the Titans:**

"It was a critical sequence in the game. We have had that happen a couple of other times this season. You're hoping for that. I think that we had the right play-call on defensively. We executed really, really well. We were able to force them out of range there. That was that was a big one for us. I thought that the defense really managed that situation well. That was a short field. I thought we really came to life. You felt the energy. That created a lot of energy for our team, when we forced that missed field. I think that our defense was really proud. That was a huge stop in the game. I think that it gave our team a big lift on the sideline."

**On RB Joshua Kelley's performance yesterday and the offense's run efficiency:**

"We had some good run production. Not the splitters that we're searching for, but I thought that we were productive. We felt like they would play a lot of two-deep [safety] shell variations. With their secondary being cleaned out, we knew that was going to be a part of their plan. We felt like it would be a very big advantage for us to try and run the football right at that, at that these light boxes, and attack it that way, and give our guys a chance to compete. Then, we really wanted to give our guys a chance to compete in the red area because we felt like that would be how they played us. We were able to finish both of our red-area drives with touchdowns running the football, and that was going to be our mindset going into the game. I felt like our guys executed well down there. Now, we just have to keep improving so that we can stay on our combinations a little bit longer, hit our tracks and our landmarks, and, hopefully, put together a big one here soon."

**On WR Mike Williams' 'contested-catch' proficiency:**

"I think the hardest thing, defensively, are loose plays. We've talked a lot about loose plays, off-schedule. When you have a quarterback like Justin [Herbert] who has that type of mobility, creativity, and then the accuracy kind of everywhere — deep part of the field, short, medium — and then you have a guy where that is what he is known for, which are loose plays — where you don't have to be perfect with the location, you can just put it in the vicinity and he's going to make it — that's a good combination. I think they both have that creativity that you need to make those plays work. Then, the chemistry, the time on task together. Mike [Williams] is one of those receivers that makes you feel so good. 'Just throw here and I will figure it out for you.' He just has that way. That subtle point on that last play, that little point is meaningful for the quarterback because you don't make that point unless you're going to make it. That's what Mike does for us. He has always been a big-play guy. He's one of our clutch players. He came up big again yesterday."

**On if yesterday was the first time that Williams 'made that point' during a game:**

"No, they've done some pre-snap stuff, when they had that crazy conversion last year against Kansas City, in the first game where he converted a slant to a nine [route]. They've done that before where they have that little chemistry. That's what you need from your top tandem. You need that it-factor and that magic. I don't think that there's much I can say about it, those guys just do it."

**On if the team 'keeps track of other teams competing for a playoff spot':**

"You're aware of what's going on in the NFL. I think what we're most aware of is what is happening with our team. We knew that, going into the second-half of the season, that we were going to have to make it happen. The AFC was tight at the bye. It's tight now. It's going to be tight at the end. Every team that we have played is in the hunt. When we played Atlanta, they were winning the division. San Francisco is having a great year. Kansas City. Arizona was fighting for their playoff lives. Las Vegas, Miami, Tennessee, they've all been big games. What we have to focus on is our team and the improvements. Talking about our defense, just keep like focusing on all three phases. From a personnel standpoint, scheme standpoint, just making sure that we're becoming the team that we're capable of being down the stretch and putting the focus there. Then, giving full respect to our opponent. Indianapolis was up 33-to-nothing last week in an NFL game. That's very difficult to do. The reason why they were is because they have a lot of good players and they have a lot of good coaches. You see it all around the league, where these games are all tight — they're all tight, regardless of what the record is. That's why the NFL is special. You just have to keep your head down and put the focus on your opponent. This week, it's the Colts. Like I said, they have a lot of good players and a lot of good coaches. We have to put our heads down and have a really good work week."

**On constructing a winning culture:**

"That was my mission coming here was to be able to build that. I think you reflect that in your moves in free agency and the draft. That's all I can really go by, is the acquisitions that we've made and the people that we've tried to bring in here to create a culture that I believe in and players that are, obviously, going to ultimately live that culture on a day-to-day basis in all three phases of the game. A coaching staff and support staff. As you guys have seen and are seeing throughout the league, it's not easy. It's hard to achieve that. I think we work really hard at it. I think we are mindful of everyone that we bring in here because your culture is your people, ultimately. They give life to all of the things that you do — your vision, structure, process and all of that. I'm very proud of our guys. The last two weeks, what I've really liked about our team is how hard we've played. I think we've played really, really, really hard. I think we're playing harder every game. I think that's important. If you're saying that as a coach, that's a good thing. You have to get your team to play hard at a high level. The execution isn't always going to be picturesque. The execution, you're searching for it. You'll get it in time. You can fix a lot of the executional type of stuff if you're just playing hard and playing together. That's what we've been doing this whole season. Now, what we have to do is get this execution as high as it can be down the stretch. That's what we're going to be searching to do here these last three weeks."

**On using play-action to spur big plays:**

"I think we had a lot of movement play-action in the plan. I think we had 11 or 12 of them in the game. We didn't have a lot of possessions in the first half because we had the eight-minute drive. We didn't have a lot of possessions in the first half. I agree with you. I agree with you in terms of that productivity and what we're searching for. We did want to run the football yesterday. If you saw the way they were playing, it was going to be hard to get the deep throws. We were able to get [WR] Keenan [Allen] on the sting. We had our chance on the seam on third down. Obviously, that was drop-back [not play-action]. They were playing a ton of two-deep variation the whole game. There was very little man-to-man, very little single safety. It was going to be a patient game one way or the other. Probably, the chunks weren't going to be there in the play-pass game. Let's just say we had thrown 10 to 12 on top of all the keepers that we threw, it was probably going to be like it was to [RB] Joshua [Kelley] in the flat. You're probably going to be checking it down a bunch. Those add up over time. That's what type of game it was going to be. That's what we have to be able to do when we're playing against a team that's playing us that way. There will be plenty of teams that play us that way. We have to be patient and we have to take our chunks in doses. They're going to add up to a big one. Hopefully, they get impatient and then we can strike. I think there were a lot of little things yesterday that prevented us from having a big day. I thought we ran it, like I said, okay. We wanted to run the football. We did not want those guys teeing off on us. That is not what we wanted. That was not the plan yesterday. We just have to continue to have the consistency on offense on early downs."



**On the offensive production in the third quarter:**

“You have to continue to ask it because it’s continuing to happen. We have to get the explosions, stay away from negative plays and score the ball in the red zone. That is the formula. Our guys have to really attack with that mindset. Until we do those little things well — it’s a simple mindset and there’s a lot of little things that add up to that. That’s where it has to be for us. We have to get the explosions because those are what, ultimately, lead to you scoring the ball. You have to stay away from negative plays. If you take a look at what happened in the second half, you get a holding penalty on a play-action pass. It puts you back to first-and-20. A play-pass could probably get checked down for a bunch of yards, but then he gets flushed and there’s a hold. We got sacked, then threw an interception and all of the sudden, the third quarter is gone. I think we had four possessions — punt, punt, interception, punt in the third quarter. In two of those drives, you had penalties and one of them you had a sack. You have to stay away from those negative plays. If you’re not going to get the explosions, you certainly can’t go backwards. Again, I stand behind what I’m saying — explosions, stay away from negative plays, score the ball in the red zone.”

**On LBs Kenneth Murray Jr., and Drue Tranquill:**

“I think Drue is having a good season for us. I think he has been solid the whole way. I think he’s taken on a much bigger leadership role. I think he’s doing a good job of getting us lined up. I think he’s communicating at a high level. I think he’s helping K9 [Murray] in a big way. I think what you’ve seen from Drue is his production in the run game and pass game, and pass rush. I think he’s been a complete linebacker for us all season. I think he has tackled well for us. He plays our best within the core, in terms of shedding blocks. As you guys saw, he got another sack yesterday in pass rush. He’s been an effective blitzier. I think that’s four on the year. Something like that, which is pretty good for an inside linebacker. He’s doing a really good job. I think K9 has really improved his game. He’s still making big strides. There is still so much for him to see and learn. I think they’re doing a good job of playing together. I think K9, every time he goes out there, he gets better. In terms of seeing the game and understanding where to fit within the run game and the pass game. I think you’re seeing him make bigger plays for us. I just like the way they’re playing together. When you have a tandem and they get to play together, they’re going to get better playing together. They have all of those things, when they’re on the field, helping each other out and there are all these little things of playing with a guy next to you, when you get that feel for one another. They’ve played very well for us the last couple of weeks.”

**On the delay of game before the game-winning field goal:**

“It just breaks my heart. We’re just trying to get the ball and the substitution. In the midst of that sequence, just getting that grouping on the field, getting it sort of communicated, getting up there and it was loud. I’m not making any excuses. It’s completely my fault. We’re just trying to rip one out of bounds and let more time go off so that we can do that. I think the other strategy that we could do the next time is just take a slow clock. Let the clock go down and then clock it late, then just finish it with a field goal. That’s the other option that we can go through. That’s certainly a learning one for me. We could have managed that better.”

**On if the team could have ran the clock down ‘as opposed to running that extra play’:**

“Yeah, just a slow clock, hit it and then end it with a field goal.”

**On QB Justin Herbert throwing on the run:**

“He has outstanding field vision. For a lot of people, when they’re flushed outside the pocket, their vision — they don’t see it as well. It’s moving fast, they don’t see it quite the same way because they’re sped up, literally. He can see the field as well as anybody I’ve ever seen. He just has accuracy everywhere on the move. He can throw it with touch. He can rip it with speed. He can throw it across the field. He just can put it where he wants, which is an advantage. Then, he has good guys to throw it to. He has targets that can also move with him to make some tough catches. Like, [WR] Mike [Williams], that’s a tough catch for a normal receiver. He’s not a normal receiver, he’s a premium receiver. So, he has some weapons that he can throw to, whether it’s Mike, [WR] Keenan [Allen], [WR] Joshua [Palmer], [TE] Gerald [Everett]. You saw, the Vegas game comes to mind — the very first one — where he kind of finds Gerald off-script right on the sideline. It’s just a dime-shot to the back shoulder, where you don’t even know what happened. Just, boom. Zing behind your ear. He can do that. I think that combination makes him very difficult to defend.”

**On OLB Kyle Van Noy and DL Morgan Fox performing the past two weeks:**

"I think those two guys played very, very well for us the last couple of weeks. I think [CB] Bryce Callahan is having a tremendous season inside. That's why you go make those acquisitions because they have that type of stuff in the big games. Those guys have played really well. I thought Kyle was really good for us yesterday. I thought, maybe his best game. Foxy has been a stud the whole way. Kyle has just had a lot of play-making the last couple of weeks. Bryce — when your nickel is quiet, when you don't really mention his name, it probably means he's playing really, really well. He's, coming back, showing real toughness coming off the groin. He played a really good game in the slot for us. We need all of that going down the stretch. You need your experienced guys to lead the way. Those guys are certainly doing it for us."

**On the challenge of taking what the defense gives you on offense:**

"I think you have to have the right expectations going into the game because otherwise you'll become impatient. You have to assess going into the game that their secondary is cleaned out. They're not going to be playing a bunch of man-to-man, single safety. This is going to be a two-deep type of game. I'm going to feel the stretch in the coverage, I'm going to see the stretch in the coverage and I'm going to be very decisive with my throw. That's going to add up to an explosion. The quicker that I can get it into my back's hands or my tight end's hand, the more he can go do something with it for you. You can't go broke making a profit. I think that's something that every player has to have the discipline to play the game the way you need to play it — not the way you want to play it. It's not a secret to everybody in the NFL that Justin Herbert can throw the football down the field. Everybody is watching the same movie you are. They don't want to give up a knockout punch. We have to be patient. We have to keep scripting for success. We're searching for the explosions the best way we know how, but if they're not there, we're heading to Plan B fast. That's going to add up to a lot of yardage for us and that's going to add up to us scoring the football better. That's what we have to do moving forward."