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## Chargers Media Availability

Friday, December 17, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On if he has been in contact with TE Donald Parham Jr.:**

"I had contact with Donald's family, his girlfriend, Brittany. His mother just arrived in Los Angeles this morning and is with him currently at the UCLA Harbor Medical Center."

#### **On Parham's injury update:**

"It was encouraging news throughout the night. We were updated about his progress, and throughout the early morning. The statement, obviously, is a good sign. He's trending positive. The most important thing is that his mom is with him, his girlfriend. He's with great care. [Sr. Director of Player Engagement] Arthur Hightower and Dr. Herb Martin have been amazing from our team, making sure that that happened with his mom getting here so quickly. I look forward to talking to him, personally, at some point today."

#### **On if CB Asante Samuel Jr. was 'close' to playing last night:**

"Yes, he was."

#### **On if Samuel is 'out of the concussion protocols':**

"From a finality standpoint, no, but he is right there at the end."

#### **On when Samuel 'will be ready to play':**

"As soon as that last hurdle is cleared, then he'll be ready to play. Last week was a really good sign for him. He's very close to being out there for us."

#### **On 'if there is any concern' that S Derwin James Jr. 'worsened his hamstring injury':**

"I saw him this morning. I don't think that it's any worse than it was going into the ball game. I think that that's where we kind of shut it down, during the game, so that it would not worsen. He couldn't open up on it, it was just kind of grabbing, but there was no damage done to it last night. He gave it everything he had. I'm so proud of him for giving it a go. Hopefully, these 10 days will allow him to rest and get well, strengthen that and hopefully be out there for us soon."

#### **On if 'the expectation' is that T Rashawn Slater will play against the Texans in Week 16:**

"That's the hope, yes."

#### **On WR Andre Roberts' opening kickoff return:**

"I thought that we were really connected with our return scheme. We felt like that that would be an advantage scheme for us going into the week, allow us to play fast. I thought Andre really had good pace taking it out. Then, he hit that hole with some velocity. I'm just really proud of him. Like I told you guys, I think he's given our team a really big lift of professionalism and a lot of the little things that go into helping some of these young guys that are out there on teams. It's a fantastic way to start the game, for sure."

**On the Chiefs ‘not kicking to’ Roberts for the remainder of the game:**

“Andre [Roberts] has that reputation. He has certainly earned it among the premier special teams coaches in the league. I think [Chiefs Assistant Head Coach/Special Teams Coordinator] Dave Toub is certainly one of them, going back to [Giants Head Coach] Joe Judge last week. He’s been such a quality returner for so many years. I think that when a return like that happens you’re definitely going to be more apt to kick it out [of the end zone], especially if you have the kicker to do so. That can be an advantage for us and, hopefully, we can create more opportunities for him. I’m really proud of that return unit. Like you guys know, the way we started the season and where we’re at, those are two different places. I’m proud of the progress that we’ve made in that phase.”

**On ‘asking the officials for why WR Keenan Allen didn’t draw a defensive pass interference’:**

“Just kept it moving.”

**On LB Kyzir White’s ‘recent emergence’:**

“Opportunity and confidence. He’s earned an opportunity. He earned it during training camp. He had an outstanding training camp. We felt like, coming out of camp that, he was our best guy. He’s just been so consistent, from the very first practice of training camp to now. He’s really improved his game in all phases, being able to see the run game, command the run game, the physicality that he takes on blocks, the physicality that he tackles with, he can tackle in the core, he can tackle in space. I would say that he’s a high-level NFL cover guy, for a linebacker on backs and tight ends. He’s a good blitz. He has good selling instincts. He’s a complete linebacker. Normally, complete linebackers have stat sheets like he has because he can make a lot of different types of tackles. I can’t say enough good things about the guy. Last night, when Derwin [James Jr.] kind of went in and out, Kyzir had the green dot again and did an excellent job running the show for us. He’s been a real bright spot for our defense. [Linebackers Coach] Michael Wilhoite has done an outstanding job coaching, mentoring him, bringing him along and really bringing out the best in him. I’m so excited about Kyzir’s season. We’re going to need to for him to continue to play like that for us to finish this season the way that we’re capable.”

**On the benefit of having a players that are ‘multiple’:**

“What [LB] Drue [Tranquill] and Kyzir [White] allow us to do is really have balanced a balanced linebacking crew, where you don’t have to ask one or the other to just do specific jobs. They can kind of mirror one another. That’s really what you want on defense in the modern NFL, you want as many guys that can mirror one another. I think that that’s what Drue and Kyzir are allow us to do because Drue has all of those same characteristics, too. I think that that’s why they’re such a nice linebacking tandem. I think that they’re a strength of ours in the middle. Last night, both of them played well. I think that both of those guys have had quality seasons. I’m proud of both of those guys. Like I said, continuing for those guys to make those improvements so that we can continue to play our best ball down the stretch.”

**On if the training facility is open for the players this weekend:**

“Yes, sir. There are guys in there right now, full treatment, full recovery stuff. You guys are aware of all of the new protocols in place within our building, so just making sure that we get good plans in place that way. But, they will have full access to the facility throughout the weekend. With those new mandates, we’re just making sure that we follow all of those specific protocols. Today and throughout the weekend, rest and recovery is at the forefront of where we need to go for Houston. When you when you go through a tough stretch like that, where you’re playing three games in 11 days, or whatever that is, the most important thing is that recovery process. Our guys are working hard at it as we speak. We’re going to need this weekend to get ourselves ready to have a really good week of practice for Houston.”

**On the Chiefs' offensive production with James not on the field compared to when he was on the field:**

"I think that's a huge variable in that equation. That's not the only reason why [Chiefs TE] Travis [Kelce] had a big night. Derwin just does so many things for us that specifically help against that specific matchup, where he's located on the field and how we organize our structure allows him to be matched up against that guy often. But a lot of that production last night, as I mentioned after the ball game, is outside of that first framework of the play. That's where I think that, last night, we didn't do a good enough job of at the end of the game, in the fourth quarter and overtime, just having that rush lane and coverage connection. Travis was able to make a couple of big plays. In the long one, we lose the edge on our left side, we have a player fall down, and then we have a post safety come out of the top and misses a tackle. That's hard to reconcile. That's a tough one because you're in a premium covered system against that specific route, you have leverage on the route, you have everything taken care of, you have a rat in the hole for [WR] Tyreek [Hill] on the shallow cross, you have it. Then, these two variables happen and, now, it's a 69-yard play. You're saying, 'Man, that's a tough one to reconcile.' Then, the one in overtime, you're talking about a guy that catches a five-yard shallow cross and splits you between three or four players. That's another tough one. Now you're saying that's 100 yards in two plays. He's a fantastic player. He's a Hall of Fame tight end. I have full respect for his game. He made a lot of big plays last night. We have to play better than that. We have to make him earn everything that he gets. We have to make him earn it. We have to make it tough on him. I didn't think that happened all the time last night. We just have to continue to emphasize the details, the little things, because those are the things that matter in a matchup like that against three quality players like that. Like I said, I have full respect for Travis' game. He had a big night last night."

**On challenging that Kelce was not ruled down by contact:**

"I was kind of a 50/50 look up from the booth. I decided to throw it. I take full ownership for that decision. From my vantage point on the replay, I just thought that there was enough movement before his tail hit the ground. I thought that this would be something worth doing. I take full ownership. I wasn't like it was a concrete, 'Hey, Brandon, let's throw it.' It was one of those 50/50 types of looks, so I decided to throw it."

**On the illegal shift penalty on the final offensive possession:**

"We were going to go with a quick cadence there. He just was not set in time."

**On if there was a 'QB sneak call tagged' on the third-down play that resulted in RB Joshua Kelley's fumble:**

"That was a straight run. That was an interior run. We were kind of on the one-and-a-half-ish [-yard line]. Felt like, against that goal line look, that's too far out to sneak it. We went with the naked [boot] on second down. Then, really, we're trying to run with physicality and run the football in on the next two. I liked the run design. I feel like Josh is going to learn from that play. The integrity of the design was supposed to be a little bit more to the left, following the double. He kind of saw daylight. If you see the run kind of express itself, he kind of saw daylight and decided to go up-and-over. Like I said, if you decide to go up-and-over, you can't reach [the ball out]. It's one thing to go up-and-over, but it's another thing to reach it. It's something that he's going to learn from and I need to do a better job of coaching it, for sure, and putting them through that circumstance, that ball security and that type of fundamentals, that process. I need to do a better job of that."

**On potential miscommunication between Herbert and WR Mike Williams on the final offensive drive:**

"They brought the WILL [linebacker] and free safety on that. We actually had it well protected, but it was one of those ones where because of the timing away, the leverage of the corner, Mike brought it back inside. The way Justin through it just didn't quite time out right. It was the right decision all the way. We had the matchup, but it just didn't quite go down. I loved the decision, loved the matchup and I loved the blitz pick-up on the WILL, free safety. We just didn't just didn't quite get that connection at that time."

**On if Herbert was 'sped up' on that play because of the blitz:**

"No, I don't think that he got sped up because of the blitz. If you watch it, the leverage of the corner — it's a nine [route], but he kind of jumped outside and Mike [Williams] kind of went back inside. It's just one of those ones where you're just a little bit off, not a lot off. Just a little bit more unlucky than anything."

**On if helping T Trey Pipkins III with protection assistance 'limited' passes down the field:**

"We had a lot of stuff up in the plan that accessed the deep part of the field yesterday. It didn't work out that way. We were able to get Mike [Williams] a couple of times. We had a couple of near misses on the back shoulder. A lot of the block-it-up play-action pass stuff that we had in the plan ended up getting checked down. We had Mike [Williams] on the deep over, ended up hitting Keenan [Allen] on the backside curl. We ended up hitting [RB] Austin [Ekeler] on the checkdown a couple of times, hit [TE] Jared [Cook] on a spear [route] where he had Mike [Williams] deeper. We had a lot of that up in the plan. We were able to hit Mike [Williams] on a spear in that plan. I felt like Justin [Herbert] really made quality decisions last night throwing the football. I really felt like [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] called a really good game last night. I really liked the way that we attacked that gameplan, especially with who you were playing with up front. I felt like that really allowed our offensive line to settle in and get their rushers off balance because what we didn't allow them to do last night was tee off on us. We never allowed them to get in that consistent rush pattern, which was a big goal of ours, especially on the edges with [Chiefs DE/LB] Melvin [Ingram III] and [Chiefs DE] Frank [Clark]. I really liked the design. Outside of a tipped pass interception on an RPO, I really liked the way that we managed that game. What the run game did last night, for us, was really control the pace of the game. I felt like, structurally, how they were playing us, that's the way we needed to play that game. Then, in the passing game, we needed to be efficient, I love the way that we managed the keeper game and some of the quick game. A couple of those scoring opportunities that didn't go down on fourth down, I think, limited our points production, but in terms of our yards and in terms of first down, we didn't punt in the game. I really thought that our offensive line did a phenomenal job all game. I felt that physicality and that movement at the point of attack. Our O-line and tight ends were really good yesterday."

**On in-game decision-making:**

"All of these decisions have a life of their own. I'm never going gamble, as a coach. These players mean too much to me. Our team means too much to me. I'm not gambling at all. I'm definitely not going to be reckless, ever. I felt like those were advantaged situations for us. I didn't think any one of those opportunities decreased our chances of winning. I felt like doing that made our chances of winning increase in a big way. What we're trying to establish around here is the mindset that we're going to try and go win the game on our terms, and the team is going to have to beat us. That's how I want to decide the game, is when if they beat us. I love those opportunities that we had yesterday. We're going to grow from it as a football team. We have full respect for the team we just played. I just think that creating that mindset and creating that way of playing is, ultimately, going to create the team that we're capable of being."

**On his biggest takeaway from last night's game:**

"My big takeaway is that I felt like our team competed at a championship level last night. I felt like that was a championship environment. I saw a team lay it on the line. I felt that our team emptied the tank. I felt like they left everything out on that field against a team that is a champion. They've been to two-straight Super Bowls. Everyone knows the record that they have achieved and earned over the last three or four seasons. I felt like our guys just played like champions last night. They competed like champions last night. I'm so proud of the way that we went nose-to-nose with that team. I'm so proud of the way that we responded within the game. There were so many things that happened in the game that we had to respond to. I love the way we competed; goal-line stands, kicking game being a factor with Andre [Roberts]. Offensively, third down and goal, got-to-have-it [situations]. Answering momentum. Going down 10-to-noting, marching down and answering with a touchdown. Coming out of the half with a big field goal stop after a pass interference. [OLB] Uchenna's [Nwosu] interception. After we lose a fumble on the goal line, we get an interception right back, and then we go run it in. I felt like our team responded last night. I felt like our team competed last night. As a coach, that's what you're looking for. You're looking for, 'Hey, did your team go for it? Did your team play fearless? Were you guys connected.' I felt like all those things are true. Then, now what we have to do is we have to focus on the details, the specifics of why we lost, because those two things can happen at the same time. That's what we're going to get to work on on Monday. But, I'm so proud of our guys. It was a great ball game last night, a great game for the NFL."

**On Allen and CB Chris Harris Jr. speaking positively about the team after the game:**

“Number one, what those two guys say means a lot to me because they’ve seen so much. Chris Harris is a Super Bowl champion. He’s an All-Decade DB. That means a lot to me. He’s big part of this season, for me, my first season as an NFL head coach. Keenan, you know the way I feel about him and how much he means to me and just growing this thing with him, a guy that’s been here longer than anybody and a guy that I lean on so much. What they say matters. What you can count on, from two players like that, is the truth. You can count on the truth from them because they’ve lived through so much. I think that certainly that wisdom that they shared with you guys is wisdom that I would take to the bank. I think that what the both of those guys know is that we have a good enough team. They both know why we didn’t win last night, too. What you realize sometimes in the NFL is that when you go nose-to-nose in a tough game like that, sometimes it doesn’t go down. What it does is it strengthens your resolve. I think it just strengthens your belief system in that you can beat anybody. That’s certainly, I think, probably what they felt. I know that’s what we all feel today, this morning. I know that’s what we felt last night. It’s the way that we feel this morning. We’re going to need both those of guys’ leadership down the stretch here to be as good as we can be. I’m excited to team up with those guys down the stretch here.”

**On the message to the team surrounding COVID-19:**

“My specific message was to rest and recover, to be around family. Take your kids to school. Be around your loved ones. Get some Christmas shopping done because you’ve earned the right to rest. Now, we have to rest and recover. We’re in such an important part of the season, so we have to make sure that we take advantage of the next three days to get their bodies right for Monday. Then, I talked about COVID and what’s happening around the league, and making sure that you make those good decisions off the field to strengthen our chances of having a team that’s ready to compete versus anybody — and not letting COVID divide our football team. The only way it’s going to divide our football team is if we let it. We’re not going to be perfect, but I think our intentions can be perfect and our actions, to the best of our ability, following safety and protocols in place within our state and our facility. It’s a topic right now. It’s undeniable. It’s undeniable for all of us and what we’re trying to do is the best we can. You have to do it together. To me, it’s not just football. It’s all of us just doing this together. That’s what we’re going to try and do. We’re going to try and stay in touch over the weekend with those reminders. We’re going to make sure that we send those reminders out because you can never do it enough.”

**On the rushing attack:**

“I’m so excited about our running game, just in general. I love the design. You guys know the way I feel about [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach] Frank Smith and [Assistant Offensive Line Coach] Shaun Sarrett — Kevin Koger, our tight ends coach, Derrick Foster, our running backs coach. [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] being at the head of everything, I just really feel like what we’ve done is we’ve really settled into who we are as a football team. I really like the design in terms of featuring our line and tight ends, and featuring our runners — and tying that into our play-pass game and our keeper game. I think that what you’ve seen is that we’ve been able to get into rhythm. I think establishing that physicality at the point of attack and allowing our O-Linemen to really come off the ball with some velocity. I think we’ve been able to get these guys into rhythm. We talk about [QB] Justin [Herbert] being in rhythm, well a great way to get an O-Line in rhythm is to come off the football. I think that we’ve been able to establish that. What we’ve been able to do is control the pace of the game, be able to score touchdowns, make first downs in short yardage. We’re going to continue to have to play that way down the stretch here when the weather gets colder, the games get tighter. You have to be able to manage the elements. I’m excited about those guys. J.J. [RB Justin Jackson], really, last night, had a big game. I thought [RB] Austin [Ekeler] had a gutsy, gutsy performance as well. I’m just really proud of our O-Line. With [T] Trey [Pipkins III] being in the lineup last night for the first time. [C] Corey [Linsley] running the show and [G] Matt [Feiler] running the show, helping him. It was a big strength of ours last night.”

**On the decision to go for it on fourth-and-goal at the end of the first half:**

“My thought process was that we were up 14-10. I thought we were playing really, really well, defensively. I felt like if you [take the] three there and go up seven points that if Kansas City scores — it’s a one-possession game. It’s a one-possession game. I really felt like, to put the pressure on them, score to make it 21-10. I felt like that would give us the type of separation for the second half that would lead us into playing the type of game that we wanted to play. I knew that if we didn’t get it, then it’s 14-10. Even if Kansas City scores to open the second half, it’s still a one-possession game. We’re a field goal from a tie game, a touchdown from taking the lead. My mindset was, ‘How can we separate in this game?’ I didn’t feel like 17-10 is a separation, for me. That was not my thought process. I wanted to be of that mindset, to separate from them because I felt like it was a great opportunity. You’re on the one-yard line, the one-and-a-half-yard line. This is your chance to separate. That was my mindset. They made a good play there. We came out in the second half and really did a nice job on that first drive. After the [pass interference], we have to hold them to a field goal and go to 14-13. In my mindset, that’s why I made the decision. I felt like the way the game bared itself out, I really felt like you can see why I made that decision.”

**On using analytics with coaching:**

“I think it’s an awesome conversation. I think that it’s what makes the game so special, is the decisions that go into it. It’s obviously a blend of both. I didn’t get to this position, personally, I didn’t make it here by going with the math. The math says that I’m a longshot to make it here, where I’m at. The math, the odds are not good. The only reason why I made it here is because of calculation. That’s what we’re doing. We’re being calculated on how we play and we are playing to the strength of our football team. That’s what, I think, the real coaches, the real football people — and I’m talking about you. You’re a real football person. All of you guys that have been covering the game your whole life. The real football people understand that what I’m doing is playing to the strengths of our football team. What I’m doing is I’m trying to make the decisions that I think are going to win us the game — that are going to win us the game. I’m ready to live with all that smoke that comes with it. I’ve been very transparent about that. What makes football and competition so great is that there aren’t going to be perfect decisions. You need to be able to live with the decisions and your team needs to know why you’re making these decisions, so that they can live with them, too. I know the way that my mindset is, I know the way that our mindset is around here. I also understand the criticism, too. I fully understand that, as well. I think that we’re building something really special here. I’m proud of the way that we competed last night. It just didn’t go down for us last night. Like I said, I give full respect to Kansas City for winning that game.”

**On the message to the team and fan base on the consistency of playing aggressive:**

“I think, hopefully, our fans, the die-hard Powder Blues — as they’re getting to know me more and more, hopefully, and they’re getting to know our team more and more, hopefully, getting to see our quarterback more and more, hopefully, I think they’ll fall in love with who we are. I know they will. I know the city of Los Angeles will. I know that we’re going to continue to improve. I know that there are going to be some times where it doesn’t go down for us, but I know that we’re going to keep getting better as we go. I know that, right now, no one is saying that the Chargers lost anything. They’re not saying that we gave anything away last night. That’s not what they’re saying. What they’re saying is that the Chargers went for it against a championship-caliber team and that they lost in overtime, in a really, really, big-time, big-time environment. And that they went nose-to-nose. Hopefully, our fans know that we beat that team once at the beginning and they beat us once. Hopefully, everyone knows that we’re here to fight. I’m excited for our fans that keep joining up with us because I think they’re going to like what they see.”