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Chargers Week 7 Media Availability

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HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the Kansas City Chiefs:

"They're having a quality season. It, obviously, starts with [Chiefs QB] Patrick [Mahomes] and [Chiefs TE Travis] Kelce, they've been together for so long. They're one of the top tandems in the league. I think that [Chiefs RB Isiah] Pacheco, in the run game, has been a really big part of their team this year. I think that he has been the engine in a lot of ways for how they play. They have a really good stable of backs with [Chiefs RB Clyde] Edwards-Helaire and [Chiefs RB Jerick] McKinnon. They have three quality runners. Then, they have a very experienced offensive line. They have a line that has played a lot of football together. They added the two tackles, but those two tackles have played a ton of football. Those interior three [linemen] have been together a long time. You see a lot of experience in that group. Then, they have a lot of different types of receivers. Definitely a complete tight end group, they use all three [tight ends]. They do a really good job of spreading the ball around. Certainly, with Patrick distributing it, a complete offensive group."

On WR Mecole Hardman being traded to the Chiefs from the Jets earlier today:

"We're very familiar with Mecole [Hardman], playing against him all of these years. We have a lot of respect for him. He fits the way that they play and gives them a dangerous return guy, too."

On Chiefs TE Travis Kelce:

"He does everything at such a premium level, as a receiver. I think the thing that is tough is just the chemistry that him and Patrick [Mahomes] have. No matter what the coverage is — man, zone, pattern-match zone — it doesn't matter, he just has an outstanding feel of how to attack and beat leverage. When you have that type of feel in the passing game, he can get open when the play isn't necessarily designed to go that way. Then, he and Pat just have that eye contact, that chemistry of feeling space and areas, and going to it. The other thing that Travis [Kelce] does such a good job of is running with the football after the catch. He's one of the top tight ends to ever play. A lot of respect for him."

On 'what can be done to stop or slow down' Kelce:

"What you have to be able to do is you have to make it tough on him, you have to make sure that you're mixing the coverages up, the matchups, and making him have to earn all of the catches that he gets. When you're playing against a premium player, that's what you want to do. If there are enough targets, there are going to be some catches, but we can make sure that they're tough catches, that they're contested. Then, that we tackle after the catch, because he's a dangerous player with the ball in his hands."

On Chiefs Defensive Coordinator Steve Spagnuolo:

"Steve [Spagnuolo] is an outstanding coach. They have a deep unit. I think that they have consistency in the secondary. I think that you can see that that group is playing together, the secondary and middle inside linebacker group. They are deep at inside linebacker. Then, when you have [Chiefs DT] Chris Jones up front, leading that group up front, he's one of the top defensive players in the league. Definitely a group that is playing well together."

On 'utilizing' WR Quentin Johnston 'in different ways' in order to 'get him the ball on the move' and 'why that hasn't happened yet':

"Good observations. It just hasn't happened yet. There's plenty of design for that. Again, it's just so early, but he needs to stay on track. I think if you look closely at the snaps that he's had, definitely getting more reps this past week, you're seeing a player that's improving, and that's what we want. That's what our emphasis has been. The practice field, the game reps, what you're going to see is the confidence and the playmaking ability. He just needs to stay on track."

On if he is 'worried' about Johnston's confidence:

"No, not at all, because everybody here is really confident in him, and I know how much confidence he has in himself."

On 'how much time it takes' for a quarterback and receiver to 'establish a connection':

"Sometimes it happens sooner than others, but if you take a look at our group of receivers, [WR] Josh Palmer is a good example — the trust that you earn over time. Then, when you earn that trust, you really take off. I know that confidence that Justin [Herbert] has in Quentin [Johnston]. That's not the issue, it's just the time on task. The more that you play together, the more belief that you have on one another. Quentin is the right guy to be coaching. You're going to continue to see him improve because he puts in all of the right work."

On S Dean Marlowe:

"He's a commander. He's steady, physical, a really good tackler. He comes from a defense that we really respect in Buffalo, specifically the safety room in there. [Bills S] Micah Hyde and [Bills S] Jordan Poyer, [Bills S] Taron Johnson — that group of guys, especially — in the middle, those guys are really quality NFL players. He has been in the room with them, in the fire. He's played in a ton of big games in his career. I was his defensive coordinator in college, so I go back a long ways with Dean [Marlowe]. He has just been steady. I think he has been great with his teammates, teaming up with them. He's just been very steady and consistent for us, and has given us two really good performances."

On Herbert and taking 'limited snaps under center' last week against the Cowboys:

"There was an element to that of keeping his finger safe. So much of our offense, and so much the offense in the NFL, is shotgun-oriented, pistol-oriented. I don't think it's uncommon to have the high percentage [of shotgun snaps], but we're just going to be mindful of it. As you guys saw, the first play of the game was under center, so there are no limitations, per se, but I think that it's just being mindful. It has not had a limiting effect on what we can do."

On S Alohi Gilman's availability this week:

"I hope that you guys don't get bored [*laughter*], but no timeline. Hopefully, I don't sound too cliché, but no timeline there."

On the play of the secondary 'over the last two games':

"I like the way that we're communicating. I like the way that we're competing, I think that they've strung together two winning performances. Like I told you guys, I feel like if we don't foul, then we're going to say, 'Man, we're coming along.' Just have to eliminate that part from the equation, but they're communicating well, they're competing. I think two winning performances for us."

On if there is anything that S Derwin James Jr. 'needs to change' based off of the penalties that he has incurred:

"He needs to change his approach because he needs to stop being penalized. He needs to lower his target and play the aggressive game that he plays, but he has to lower his strike zone and make sure that he's making good decisions. It is the way it is and you have to make adjustments when you've had things go the other way — and he will, he's too smart of a player. He's such a leader on our team."

On the 'level of difficulty' of changing a player's approach to tackling in-season:

"You have to get to the games, when it's full-speed tackle. The Collective Bargaining Agreement doesn't allow you to hit in the offseason, or very much during training camp. Preseason games are the way that they are. It's the element of timing and it's the element of decision-making. Derwin [James Jr.] will do both of those things moving forward for us. He's too smart of a player."

On 'what has led to' OLB Khalil Mack's performance over the last two games:

"I think that the easy answer is health. He is really healthy, and a healthy Khalil Mack is a productive Khalil Mack. I think we've done an outstanding job against the run, which has earned him more opportunities to rush. Against [Raiders RB Josh] Jacobs and [Cowboys RB Tony] Pollard, we had more opportunities to rush. I think he has capitalized on his matchups. When you can get into a rhythm, as a rusher, that's as good as Khalil is, I think that you're going to be consistent around the quarterback, which is what he has been. I would say the same thing about Foxy [DL Morgan Fox]. It really starts with us killing the run. When they get those consistency of opportunities, pass-rushing, those guys are really good."

On if this game is a 'really critical game':

"They're all critical. But, I think, especially after a tough loss, you have to respond the right way. I think the way that you do that is staying consistent in your approach and being committed to how you do things. This is going to be a different week because it's a shorter week, but in terms of the approach of how we attack a plan and what's needed to be our best for Sunday, that has to stay the same. What you have to focus on are the keys to winning. What ultimately is going to impact winning on Sunday? That's where our full focus has to be right now. From now until kickoff, just focusing on the things that are going to help us win."

On what he 'expects to see' out of Herbert on Sunday:

"We just expect him to bounce back and play his game. He doesn't need to do anything more than that. There are going to be some tough games for players. I think it's noticeable for Justin [Herbert] because he doesn't have very many of them in four years. You can point to one because there just hasn't been very many. Like I said after the game, I thought he competed great in the game and gave us a chance to win in the game. Justin, he just needs to keep being the player that he is and not doing anything more than that, and just playing his type of ball and leading us and impacting us, like he always does. We know that he is going to bounce back. It's going to start on the practice field. He pours in all the right work. Excited to see him back on the practice field. I know that he'll respond the right way."

On Chiefs Head Coach Andy Reid:

"With Andy [Reid], such a good example of: When you've been a head coach for as long as he has, 1999 — long time — you don't stay a head coach in the NFL that long if you haven't evolved, if you haven't stayed ahead of the league and anticipated where the league is going and playing to the strengths of your team and really bringing out the best of it. When I think of Andy, I think of that, going all the way back to Philadelphia. At the very beginning, there was a lot of different periods there in Philly, and there have been a lot of different kinds of periods here in Kansas City. He's one of the top coaches in the league. I have so much respect for him. He's as tough of a cover as you're going to have, in the NFL, especially when you have that group that he's been with for so long. He's been with Patrick [Mahomes] and Travis [Kelce] and that group for so long, you can see the chemistry that they have."

On if he 'brings up to the team' the Chiefs' stretch of AFC West Division titles as of late:

"We have the ultimate respect for this team, but you got to make it about your team. You can't make it about Kansas City. It has to be about the Chargers and how we play and how we prepare and, ultimately, how we perform. That's how you go nose-to-nose with the best people in the league. You're not really worried about them, you have full respect for them, but you have to make it about you."

On the tight end group's utilization on the run game:

"There are a lot of different ways that we can deploy them. We have full confidence in that group. There are a lot of different types of guys that we have. The bottom line is that we have to do better. That's the bottom line. It's not just the tight end group, it's the O-line group, it's the runners, receivers and quarterback, coaching, all of it. We need to improve in that phase."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On his finger:

"It feels good, thank you. No changes with it so far."

On if he will 'continue to wear a glove' on his non-throwing hand:

"I would assume so. I'm not quite sure. I think that's something to address during this week."

On having a short week:

"You always love to get back out there on the field. It was unfortunate the way things went. We learned a lot from it. We're going to have to get better because of it. Everyone showed up to work today, gave their best effort. Guys are in there, the locker room. We trust these guys to show up and be professionals about it. We look forward to another good week of practice."

On what was 'learned' from Monday's game:

"We could be out here for a long time if you want to get into specifics. I, unfortunately, do not [have all day] *[laughter]*. There are a lot of opportunities for big plays downfield. Kind of like we mentioned earlier, especially after the game, missed a couple of passes. There are some plays that I'd love to have back, but there's nothing that we can do about that now. The goal, the mission for today is to be better than we were yesterday and to learn from those mistakes. Get our bodies back. There's a lot to look forward to."

On the Chiefs' defense:

"They're a very good defense. They've done a great job of forcing turnovers and getting after the passer. They are, kind of like you said, kind of young, but they don't play like it. They play like they're veterans all around the board. They're really well-coached. When you have a group like that together, it's going to make for a really good defense."

On Chiefs DT Chris Jones:

"I think one of the great things that they do is that they can put him anywhere. Whether it's inside, outside, he can rush from so many different spots. Definitely is one of those guys that you have to be aware of wherever he is on the field."

On the offense:

"I think that we just need to execute better. It starts with me being able to complete balls and being able to get first downs, keep the ball moving. If we're able to do that, I think we're a much more efficient offense. I think we just have to go out there and execute. The coaches are putting us in a position to win and make plays. It's on us."

On playing under center less:

"I think one of the great things about our offense is being able to adapt and adjust. Whether it's in the gun or whether it's under center, we're going to have a plan. We felt like we did a good job with install on that, walking through that and preparing for the week. It didn't go our way during the game, but to be able to adapt and go to the gun as much as we did, I thought our offense did a great job of handling that."

On if the team is 'perplexed' by the 2-3 record:

"This is the NFL. Tough things are going to happen and it's all about how you react to it. There's nothing that we can change about our record. I wouldn't say anyone is perplexed. I think that's the NFL. The guys in the locker room showed up to work today and they're going to give their best effort. They know that we have a chance to play on Sunday. It's another opportunity to go play football, so we're going to have our best week of practice and preparation, and keep moving forward."

On facing Chiefs QB Patrick Mahomes:

"I think they are always great opportunities. He's an incredible quarterback and I have so much respect for him as their quarterback and their offense. To be able to go out and play, it's always a great opportunity to watch great football."

On one-score games against the Chiefs:

"I think that's just a testament to the respect that we have for them. We know how special of a team they are. It's going to take our best effort. It starts today. It started yesterday. For us to be able to show up and have a good week of practice, I think that's the most important thing."

On if there's a 'sense of urgency':

"There's a sense of urgency regardless of the week. Whether it's Week 1 or whether it's Week 6 or 7, guys are wanting to win. I think that's the most important thing, but panicking isn't going to help anyone. Whether it's 0-5 or 2-3, panicking won't help. To understand that guys are showing up and they're going to give their best effort, we're going to do everything that we can to win this game. That's the most important thing. If you start looking forward or too far ahead, I think you lose your focus."

On Mahomes:

"I think he's done a great job of making plays. He's had so much success in the league. Whenever you turn the film on of him, he's going to make plays. He's going to find a way to move the chains. Whether it's a play that breaks down, he's great off his feet. Great at scrambling. I have a lot of respect for him, as a quarterback."

On the rushing offense:

"I think we just have to trust our guys. We have a great offensive line. We have some great tailbacks. It might not have gone our way [on Monday], but I know that we have faith and trust in those guys to be able to get the ball moving."

On preparing for the Chiefs and their recent trend of success:

"I think that's a good way of looking at it. We have so much respect for them, as a team. We understand the great things that they've been able to accomplish over the past few years. That's the ultimate goal in the NFL, to be able to win games and be able to be consistent like that. It's always a great opportunity, kind of like we mentioned earlier. This is a team that we're going up against that requires all of our attention. We have to have a good week of practice and preparation. We have to be dialed-in all week to have any shot on Sunday."

On if plays he would like to have back 'stick with' him:

"I'm worried about throws from four or five years ago [*laughter*]. Unfortunately, that's part of the position of quarterback. I felt horrible. For [WR] Keenan [Allen] to be able to run two routes like that and be able to miss him, it's tough. I know that if I'm going to get that shot again, I'm going to make that throw. I hope he believes that, too. If we were having a full-on practice today, we'd be out here making those throws. It's unfortunate like that, but you have to learn from it and keep moving."

On learning to move on from games and plays:

"It's incredibly tough. It's part of the game, unfortunately. I wish it were never to happen, but unfortunately, mistakes are going to be made. You miss those two throws. The important thing, for me, is to move on and understand, we have to be realistic, we have to be critical and understand that I can make those plays. I know that I can make that throw. We've done that before. To be able to move on and understand that it's always about the next play. Not to let that one affect your next one. I feel like we've done a good job of that over the past couple of years."

On facing Kansas City on a short week:

"It's part of the NFL. It's the way things happen. Whether you're coming off Monday or whether you're going onto a bye, you don't have any control over the schedule. We can sit here and complain, or we can get our bodies back and do everything we can to have our best week of practice, regardless of the situation. I think that's one of the great things that our team has been able to handle, as well."

On playing at GEHA Field at Arrowhead Stadium:

"It's always a fun environment. The fans are great there. It's such a great opportunity to play football. It's one that you always dream of. Going into a place like that, it's always a great opportunity."

On getting extra yards on runs when defenders may think he's sliding:

"I don't think it's a deception tactic, I think it's reading body language. If I feel like there's room for me to maybe to get upfield or maybe room for me to not get tackled and avoid a hit, I think that's always important. I don't think I'm trying to deceive anyone or try to fake a slide, or fake going out of bounds. If I have space and I don't necessarily need to cut out of bounds and I'm able to turn upfield and get a couple more yards, I think that's huge for our offense."

On playing with his injured finger:

"Just understanding that I didn't have great use of it. I think that's pretty important for playing quarterback."

On any 'hindrances' with his finger:

"Probably just a lack of mobility. A lack of being able to flex it or really use it in gripping the football."

On his finger:

"I doesn't feel good. It is what it is. It's a broken finger. I'm going to do everything I can to be able to minimize the movement and minimize the damage to it. I felt like I was safe going out there. I thought the athletic trainers did a great job preparing me and getting me ready to go."

On the importance of the finger on his left hand:

"I think all of your fingers are pretty important [*laughter*]. I was kind of thankful that it was the left hand. It's not necessarily on the right hand. I felt safe heading out there."

SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.

On preparing to face the Chiefs:

"I'm excited. I can't wait to get back out there and play another game. Can't wait."

On Chiefs TE Travis Kelce and 'what makes him so great':

"His ability to get open. He's always finding his way to get open. Yards after the catch, he's one of the best at doing that. I just have to be ready. We have to be ready."

On 'what it will take to slow down' Kelce:

"Doing my job. Knowing my defense, executing. Going out there giving them different looks and changing it up on them. You have to be physical. You have to go out there and you have to guard him. That's all it comes down to."

On Chiefs QB Patrick Mahomes:

"He's one of the best that we have to offer in this league. He presents a challenge for the defense. As a defense, it's on us to stop guys like that. We just have to be ready for the challenge. I can't wait for Sunday to get that opportunity."

On the importance of Sunday's game:

"It definitely feels like an important game for us. Like I've said we haven't gotten off to the start that we want. We get a new opportunity this week. We have to get out there and fix what we need to fix."

On last week's loss and the 'impact' that carries into this week:

"You can't let one game, two games or three games keep turning into more games. You have to find whatever it is and fix it and get out there and play."

On areas in which the defense can improve:

"If you're looking at our defense, we're coming out there and playing hard. We just have to finish. Those third-and-longs are killing us. The penalties, I can clean that up. We just have to get off the field on the third-and-long. I like the way that we play. We just have to finish what we're doing."

On what he can do to 'fix' how he is tackling opponents to avoid penalization:

"I'm already going low, and then guys are ducking. I just have to get low, I guess. I'm a professional, they pay me to do my job. If they're going to call it like that I have to be responsible and not hurt my team and get better from it. It's that simple."

On Chiefs QB Patrick Mahomes and the challenge of tackling him:

"You definitely have to wrap him up. He can throw it right hand, left hand, with a guy holding him. You just have to get him all the way to the ground. The play is never over with this team, we know that as a defense. We have to strain."

On Mahomes' performance this year:

"He's just being him. They're playing ball. Like I've said, I can't wait for the challenge to go up against him Sunday."

On the Chiefs' receiving corps:

"We just have to be ready to play. He's going to throw it to the guys he's going to throw it to. We just have to be ready."

On if he is 'thinking about' how he tackles since his disqualification in Week 15 of last season:

"I think I am a little bit. I do think. But like I said I'm not here to referee what they need to call. I'm here to play football and help my team win games."

On the start of the season:

"Not the start we wanted, but nobody's down. We know the type of team we have. We're just a few plays away. I know that sounds like a cliché, but we just need to clean up what we need to clean up on defense, the penalties. I like where we're headed."

On how 'critical' Sunday's game is:

"Every game is a critical game from here on out. We have to win them. Like I said, this is a big game, a division game. We're both 1-0 in the division, so it starts on Sunday."