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Chargers Week 14 Media Availability

Friday, December 10, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On DL Justin Jones:

“He’s trending positive for the game. He was out there at practice and I think that he is going to be fine for the game.”

On WR Keenan Allen, CB Chris Harris Jr., C/G Scott Quessenberry and WR Mike Williams:

“I think that Keenan and Scott will be out for the game. Mike and Chris have continued to test negative. As long as tomorrow goes OK, they should be good for the game.”

On the New York defense:

“Their defense is outstanding. I really have a ton of respect for their defensive coordinator, Patrick Graham. I really think he’s one of the top coordinators in football. I think that he’ll be a head coach in the league. I don’t know him personally, but I have a lot of respect for his game and I think he’s been around a lot of good ball. I think his team, in two years, has done a really good job of giving them a lot of opportunities in the last two years. We played them last year when I was with the Rams, it was 17-9. It was a really, really tough game. I mean, we scored in the end to win that game, but it was a really tight game. They have a lot of really good personnel on defense. Up front, [Giants DL] Dexter Lawrence [II], [Giants DL] Leonard Williams, those two guys are really, really good players. On the edge, [Giants LB] Lorenzo Carter, [Giants LB] Ximines [Oshane] — the guy from Old Dominion, I did a lot of work on him. They drafted the kid from Georgia, [Giants LB] Azeez [Ojulari], who is playing fantastic. In the second level, [Giants LB] Reggie Ragland, [Giants LB] Tae Crowder, those guys are a good linebacking tandem. Then in the secondary, they have a lot of pieces there to play winning defense. [Giants CB James] Bradberry has been a good player for a long time. He has really good ball skills. He’s a good tackler. [Giants DB] Logan Ryan has been a champion. [Giants S] Xavier McKinney, the young safety, we did a lot of work on him when I was with the Rams. He’s playing really, really good football. They have a quality group back there. [Giants CB] Adoree’ Jackson is there, who has played a lot of winning football. They’re extremely well-coached. They’ve had a really good red zone defense since Patrick [Graham] has been there. They’re very good against the run. When you see them play the premium offenses in the league that they’ve played — whether it’s Tampa [Bay] or Kansas City, they’ve given those guys all they can handle. Then, what they did a couple of weeks ago that caught my attention was the way they played Philadelphia. Philadelphia had been rolling by running the ball, quarterback run game with [Eagles QB Jalen] Hurts and all that. They completely shut that thing down. They had a bunch of takeaways. They’re playing really, really quality football on that side of the football. They have our full attention. I just think they have really good personnel. I think they do a really good job coaching.”

On DL Linval Joseph:

“Linval is trending very positive. He was out there today at practice and feeling good. As long as nothing happens between now and game time, he should be good to go.”

On if Joseph would have a snap count on Sunday:

“Good question. If he is going to be at the game, he’s going to be playing the way Linval can play. That’s what we really wanted to make sure, was when he is out there, he can give us his best. He’s had a good week of practice.”

On the backup center position:

“We’re still working through that right now. There will be some decisions here in the next 48 hours before gameday in making that call.”

On what he would say ‘the team’s identity is right now’:

“I think that we’re a team that can beat you in all three phases. I think that we’re a team that can play our best at the end of the game. We’ve been in a lot of close games. I think we have that type of team that can play its best in the fourth quarter when it’s winning time against quality competition. I think our identity is that we’ve been battle-tested. When I think of our team, I think that we’re battle-tested. I think that we’ve been in a lot of premium games against premium teams that are all in it. I think that we have a really good formula for how we want to play the game. We’ve played in a lot of different types of games — high-scoring, low-scoring types of games. I just feel like we have a complete team. A team that can sort of play any type of game that needs to be played. That’s what our goal is, to be able to play in any type of football game and be able to win it. I think that our best football is ahead of us, I really do. I don’t think that we’ve had that statement game or that signature game where all three phases have just crushed it together, but I think we’re working that way. I think that all three phases of our team have made a lot of progress throughout this season. I think, at the same time, there’s that extra gear that I think we can get to in all three phases as a team. That’s what we’re shooting for. I think that’s what’s exciting about our team right now. We’ve continued to put in really good weeks of preparation. That’s how we’re going to end up playing our best at the end.”

On ‘if going for it on fourth down helps set up your identity’:

“We’re definitely going to play the game on our terms as much as we can. I think that those fourth-down decisions, we have aggressive modeling. I think that mindset is something that our players have really bought into and our coaches have bought into. I think we know coming into those ‘got-to-have-it’ moments that’s going to be a part of how we do things. We’re going to be able to respond either way, whether it goes down or it doesn’t, we’re going to force teams to play us. I think that’s definitely the mindset that we want to have.”

On the team’s consistency:

“What I’ve really talked them about it is that I’ve loved the consistency of our preparation. I think that has been evident to me and to all of us. Our intensity and focus in preparation has been consistent. Now, our performance on gameday and some of the results have been that way. I think those two things are different. I think at that since the bye, the reality is that we haven’t won two in a row. Establishing that mindset of doing what it takes at the game in order to make sure that happens because at the end of the season, that’s how you end up making a run, is you have to win games in a row. You can’t just go back-and-forth. That’s just been our mindset, is when we get to the game — I love the way that we’ve prepared, but then that mindset at the game of being able to do what it takes within the game to play that game the way that it needs to be played. The little things are what have made the big difference in the second half of the season. When we’ve performed well, we’ve taken care of a lot of those little things. In the games that haven’t gone our way, the little things have gotten away from us. We’re putting our emphasis and focus there, and really doing it together as a team because I think what’s also been evident is, in our losses, it hasn’t just been one phase or the other, it’s been all three phases where those little things haven’t gone right. That’s where our focus has been and where it’s going to continue to be.”

On if the 'ups and downs' have 'tested his patience':

"It's been a discovery process since the beginning of the year. I think that we've endured a lot of the attrition in the NFL — lineup changes. I think from a style of play standpoint, as I've told you guys since the springtime, you can't just say, 'Hey, this is our way of playing.' You have to say, 'Okay, this is the way we need to play based on who we have.' I feel like we've worked really hard to figure all of that out and define roles and getting guys doing the right jobs, getting them into a comfort zone. I think that's been a fight to do that, but I've seen the improvements. Really, since the bye week, I just think that we've made a lot of improvements as a defense. I think that's evident in how we're playing. I thought that last week was a good example of that. I really thought against Pittsburgh that we played a really good game. That score isn't indicative of how that game went, defensively, for us. That's been how it's been a little bit during the season. I feel like we've made huge improvements as a unit. I know that our guys have a lot of confidence in one another in how we're playing. That's what you're hoping for, is that at the end of the season, your guys feel that way. Then, we still have that other gear that I know we can get to. Hopefully, we can continue to work towards that."

On the narrow margin in the AFC this season:

"I think the perspective of the league, when you look in front of you and behind you in the standings is that you do know that one game can make a huge difference. I think there is that sense of urgency and that sense of purpose, really, that you have knowing that there's so much at stake each and every week. I think what our mindset has to be around here and where we need to go as a team and as an organization, is if the standings are tight or not — like, let's just say it wasn't that way, is that each week has a life of its own and our intensity is going to be there regardless of if it's tight or not. That's what we're trying to create here, is that consistency in performance that regardless of who we're playing, regardless of where anyone is in the standings that there is a lot at stake every game and how we play is what matters. The fact that we're in the hunt right now, I'm excited about that. Hopefully, our preparation and performance will be reflective of that. Taking care of the little things this time of year is indicative of where you are as a team. I'm excited to prove ourselves against a good team this week. New York is a really good team. They have our full respect."

On the wide receivers on Sunday:

"It will be, depending on the receiver groupings, [WR] Josh [Palmer] and [WR] Jalen [Guyton] will share that mantle with Mike [Williams]. Depending on if there are two or three receivers and depending on which type of two-receiver grouping it is. Those two guys will be the starters with Mike."

SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR DERIUS SWINTON II

Opening statement:

“First, I want to give my condolences to the family of Demaryius Thomas. He was one of those special guys. I had him in Denver. Obviously, he didn’t play special teams, but he would always be around our drills and just hang out. He’s just a person you remember. I just didn’t want to go on this platform without saying that. You have special guys you coach over the years and he’s one of those guys. I think you’ll see it as this goes along. People talk about him as a player, and that goes without saying, but him as a person. Condolences to his family. It’s a shock to everybody, but he’ll be remembered. That will be somebody that will stick with me for a long time.”

On LB Amen Ogbongbemiga’s growth:

“It’s week-to-week. Maturation and growth for a lot of these young guys, this game was a culmination, he was just the one that was on display this week. [LB] Nick Niemann is third in the conference in [special teams] tackles. Every week, you see a different one where the light goes on. For him, in that way and on that platform, to really do it, it was really good. I’m happy for him to be able to show it, but as I told him, it’s every week. He’s good like that and I think he’s learning. [Linebackers] Coach [Michael] Wilhoite played for me, so he’s been his ear about things he can do and things that will show up. I think what you saw there was just his speed, and the whole team’s speed, showing up on the kickoff unit and all the units last week. He’s been doing well, just getting better. Hopefully, he will show up every single week. That’s part of being a young guy.”

On if WR Andre Roberts is ‘close to’ returning a punt or kickoff for a touchdown:

“That’s why we brought him in. That guy, he’s one block away or one broken tackle away. The returns, he runs them with a sense of urgency. He sees the field better than a lot of people do. That’s why we brought him in. Everybody was saying that they thought that he lost some juice, well, he got up past 21 miles per hour — I think that’s not losing juice. That’s a good thing. For that production to show up, it’s good for us to start a game like that, to set the tone in an away game, in a hostile environment against a team that’s probably going to be in the playoff hunt. It was good for us set the tone and keep it going. I was happy for the guys. Having him just show up, work that we put in, that’s every week just chipping away to a win. It showed up in a big way. That was really good for the whole unit, especially for him.”

On the ‘impact’ that Roberts and K Dustin Hopkins have provided to the special teams units:

“I think any time that you add veteran guys who have done it for a long time to a young group, they steady the waters a little bit. I think they brought the confidence in those guys like, ‘Hey, we’ve done this. This is how you do it. We’re going to be steady at our jobs if you guys just do this and help us. We’ll just go along and get better and better.’ Andre [Roberts] is always talking to the blockers. He’s always saying, ‘Hey, I’m setting them up like this, just make sure that you do this.’ Dustin [Hopkins] is talking to those guys on kickoff like, ‘I’m going to hang it up there.’ It’s the older guys. Everywhere you see it. On offense, [TE] Jared Cook brings some stability, [C] Corey Linsley — older guys that have played this game for a long time bring some stability to the young guys, and where they might be panicked in other situations, the older guys are like, ‘Hey man, it’s a long season. It’s a long game.’ I think you see it over and over. Those two guys that we bought in, they were great additions by [General Manager] Tom [Telesco] and Coach [Staley]. We’re happy to have them.”

On Roberts being ‘fearless’ as a returner:

“I think it’s either you’re fearless, or you’re scared. It’s one of the two things. There are some guys that just run in there and they’re like a blind dog in a meat house, you just see them run in there. With him, it’s more strategic. It’s really a nuanced position. He knows how to set up blocks, it’s like a very good running back on top of the fearlessness, so when you get that combination, you’re dangerous. Back in the day, you look at [former NFL returner] Brian Mitchell, somebody that had speed, but always set up blocks. You look at the great returners, they have both. Then, you look at special guys like [Buccaneers WR] Antonio Brown. I wouldn’t say that he was fearless, but he was fast and he ran like he was scared, like a dog was chasing him. You have guys like that. Not to say that he’s scared, but that’s just how he is technique-wise, his way of running. Andre [Roberts] is more technical. He sees the entire picture. Then, he accelerates and uses that fearlessness, that speed, to make the big returns. I think it’s a combination. But, it’s great to have a veteran who’s done it. That’s all he’s really done. To be a true professional of doing that, it’s great to have him around.”

On Roberts talking to DB Trey Marshall following his fair catch against the Bengals:

“I think it’s just communicating like, ‘Hey, I’m close behind you,’ just letting him know. I think that’s the conversation of, ‘Hey, I was looking here. I might’ve returned this one, so be aware of where you were.’ I think that’s the communication. It’s the same as [QB] Justin [Herbert] throwing it to somebody, and then to the guy on the back side saying, ‘Hey, I was looking at you, just know that I’m still looking at you. Don’t let up on that.’ I think that it’s the same exact conversation. It’s, ‘Hey, I’m right behind you. I’ll let you know if I’m going to catch this.’ He was going to fair catch it, but just giving them a heads up that he was right behind him. I think that was the communication.”

On if Roberts is more skilled at punt or kickoff return:

“He’s been Pro Bowl at both. Does Justin [Herbert] throw the short ball better than the long ball? It’s a high-level player, they’re good at everything that they do. I think that’s shown by the production at multiple teams on multiple things. I think what you’ve seen since he’s gotten here, as a punt returner, you see teams keeping it away from him. Last week, you see the punter shanking out of bounds, you see him hitting it high and short. It’s very unique where you get a guy that can control field position by just being a human being and being back there. When he’s back there, they’re paying attention to it. You don’t see teams giving us 50-something-yard balls because they know that if they give him yardage with room to work, you’ll get a big return. He did that even last week. You saw it where the gunner is trying to stay out of bounds and stays out longer thinking that he can get to him, gets a penalty, then he gets a 13-yard return and that ends up adding up to a 28-yard return, really. I think that part of the game, his impact is so much bigger than you think. We’re thinking just about yardage, but his impact of being back there changes field position, it changes penalties, guys try to make plays that might not be there because he is back there. That impact is really being shown as both a kick returner and punt returner. You look at [Giants Head Coach] Joe Judge and what he has done over the years against Andre [Roberts] and against good returners. I anticipate [Giants K] Graham [Gano] pop-kicking this week because he doesn’t want to put it into Andre’s hands. That’s what Joe’s done over the years in New England, when Andre was in the AFC East, and he’s done it with the Giants when they’ve gotten hit on big returns or things like that. Those are the ways that he manipulates the game. We expect that to happen. That’s part of having a great returner back there.”

On coaching P Ty Long to not punt the ball into the end zone on a close punt:

“I was joking with him that you watch the Pittsburgh game from last Sunday night and [Steelers P Pressley] Harvin [III] hits the same exact punt and it goes out of bounds. It’s the inches of the game. When it hit the goal line, it kicked back. That means that everything was right about it, there was just a little bit of a gray area there. Hindsight is 20/20; do you take a delay of game there and move us back five [yards]? I tell him all the time, default aggressive, but it’s just golf with a pitching wedge, you just take a little bit off the swing. He knew it. It’s just one of the learning things. We hadn’t ever punted from the plus-40, so it was one of those things. That’s part of manipulating the game. That’s part of this time of year with weather and things and how the game is going. But he learned from it. He probably wants it back, but it’s one of those learning situations that will go on.”

On his favorite memory of Demaryius Thomas:

“He was coming up on his free agency year. He was wearing these Nike shirts around the facility that said, ‘Determined, hard-working,’ they had different mantras on the front. But, on the back, it said Chapter 8-11-8. I would always joke with him at practice. He would come and do gunner drills and one day I go, ‘I know the Bible pretty well, but what is that?’ He goes, ‘Think about it.’ I go, ‘What do you mean?’ He goes, ‘Number 88 is going to make them file for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy with how much I’m going to make them pay me.’ I have the shirt still. That’s him — him and his agent came up with it. He was soft-spoken, but he had his ways. I still have the shirt and I laugh at it because it’s a subtle way, because he wasn’t a very boisterous guy, of saying that his work is going to take care of itself and number 88 is going to make them file for Chapter 11. That’s one of the things that I remember. People say his smile; he would always hug everybody. Special teams coaches, we’re walking around when they’re doing team, and he would always go up to [Hall of Fame QB] Peyton [Manning], and Peyton told this in his retirement speech, that Demaryius would always say, ‘I love you, thanks for coming here.’ That’s who he was. He was a genuine guy. I have the shirt and I will never get rid of that shirt. He would wear it around the building, but people didn’t know what it meant. I had to ask him one day and that’s what it meant. That’s one of my stories for him.”

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On improving as an offense:

“There are always things that we can improve on, especially third downs, the middle eight between the end of the first half and the start of the second half, just continuing to put together an entire game of offense. I've been really pleased with the effort that everyone's put in and all the improvement that we've put together.”

On WR Keenan Allen:

“Keenan's a very special player and, obviously, a huge part of our offense. But, we have to prepare as if he's not going to play. We have to have the guys step up. We believe in that receiver group and all of their depth. They've done an incredible job so far this week. Whatever happens, we have to be ready for it”

On WR Joshua Palmer:

“Josh Palmer has really stepped up. We knew how special he was going to be during fall camp, just with how he's been able to adapt and pick up the offense so quickly. Everything that we're asking him to do — to play inside, to play outside — it's a lot on the plate for the rookie, but he's done an incredible job so far.”

On the emphasis placed on winning back-to-back games:

“A big sense of urgency. That's one of those things that you have to address. We're thankful that we did. This entire week of practice, we have to be sharp on our preparation, we have to be laser-focused and dialed in. We feel like it's been a good week of practice for us so far. It's going to require all three phases to be locked in for all four quarters of the game. That's what is going to give us a shot to be able to play on Sunday.”

On if Head Coach Brandon Staley supporting the group's urgency:

“I think it's just an emphasis on putting together a good week of practice after a win. Sometimes, you feel comfortable after wins. You can't have that in your locker room. You have to have the same mental preparation after losses as you do after wins. If everyone is dialed in and focused — and when he mentioned it in the Tuesday morning meeting, everyone had a sense of urgency that day. For him to say that and to kind of spark that, I think will be good for our team.”

On connecting on deep passes against the Bengals:

“Any time that those guys are able to make those plays, it helps our offense. To be able to get chunks of plays like that, I think it opens up things. We're always trying to take shots, we're always doing our best to take those shots. If the protection holds up and we get the ball downfield, great. Sometimes defenses play those tough coverages that don't allow that to happen. It's all about finding those shots and being able to be smart with it.”

On the Giants' defense:

“They have some really athletic guys on defense. It doesn't take long to turn on the film and see that they have a lot of special play-makers on that side of the ball. They have a really good front seven that haven't been giving up a whole lot of runs up the middle. They've done an incredible job of stuffing that. Then, you get some good cover guys and some safeties that really play good football. It's going to be a tough challenge. We have to do everything we can to get the ball out quick, find those guys. They're a really tough defense.”

On the offense's ability to run RPOs:

“With as many tools that we have — [WR] Keenan [Allen], [RB] Austin Ekeler, [WR] Mike [Williams], J.G. [WR] Jalen Guyton], all of those guys on the outside — I think having those options of being able to spread the ball and hold defenses accountable to guarding all of those guys, especially Austin Ekeler out of the backfield, I think that's kind of given us definitely an advantage for us to be able to push the ball downfield. At the same time, if there's a light box, being able to hand it off and get some yards.”

On being named Nickelodeon's 'NVP' and getting slimed by teammates:

“It's a huge honor. But, unfortunately, I had to throw after practice. I had to get all of that stuff off, but I was able to throw after practice so it didn't cause me any trouble. Preparing for anything, just in case anything ever happens like that. We'll be ready next time.”

On C Corey Linsley being nominated as the team's Walter Payton Man of the Year nominee:

"He's a leader, within the program and outside of it. He's done an incredible job of stepping up and being that vocal leader of our team. He's had such a huge role in the community already. Not having been here for a ton of time, he's made his impact on us and the rest of the community. We all believe in him. We love to play behind him. We're a different team when he's out there."

On Linsley as a teammate:

"He's very authentic. I don't think he loves the recognition. I think if he could have been able to have this impact and not get the recognition, I think he would have loved to have done that because he's one of those guys that just works — that's all he does. He's had such a big impact on everyone around us that it is time that we recognize him and for all the special things that he's been able to do over the past couple of months."

On the run game:

"To be able to run the ball is huge for our offense. To have that balanced attack of being able to throw the ball and being able to run the ball for yards, I think is huge. With our offensive line and the guys that we believe in upfront, they've done an incredible job all year and it's just something that you have to keep working on and keep getting better at."