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LOS ANGELES CHARGERS vs. MINNESOTA VIKINGS POSTGAME TRANSCRIPTS

Sunday, November 14, 2021 ⚡ SoFi Stadium ⚡ Inglewood, Calif.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the run defense's performance today:

"I thought that we played well against the run. I really wish we would have knocked down that last run on the fourth-and-two, but I thought our guys competed today at a high level against a really good running attack and two really good runners. I really felt like we've really settled into how we want to play and who we want to play with. I think that our guys are responding to coming after the bye [week] with a lot of purpose. We're playing with a lot more physicality. We're tackling well. We're setting better edges. We're playing with more penetration up front. Our second and third level [defense] is a lot more sure of where to fit because of it. I think that we've made a lot of improvement over the last three games.

On the offense's continuity:

"I like the way that we're utilizing our people. I think that we've gone into these games with really quality plans. I think that our execution today wasn't good enough. Our execution on offense, our execution on defense and in the kicking game, it wasn't consistent enough to beat that team. That's why we lost, because our guys are playing really hard. We need to execute better, for sure. We went through some stretches there offensively where there were far too many three-and-outs, especially in the first half. We had the two punts, a short-field field goal, and then we threw the interception in our own area. Then, we showed some really good stretches of moving the football at will. We just have to execute more consistently. It's not just offensively, it's the same thing with our defense and our kicking game."

On giving up third-down catches to Vikings WRs Justin Jefferson and Adam Thielen on the final defensive drive:

"We were in coverages that we feel like are really good. The first one, I really felt that the story was on the second down where the guy kind of fell forward — we had him tackled, and then he kind of, I don't know, scored it through and made it a third-and-six. It should have been the third and much longer than that, it was just kind of a weird, unlucky circumstance. Then we're in, kind of like, a drop eight [defenders] Cover 1 — we played a lot of split-safety man [defense] to take away both of those guys. We were kind of in a drop eight [defenders], Cover 1. We wanted to pack the middle of the field, [Vikings QB Kirk Cousins] threw a lob outside. It was one of those perfect throws and perfect catches. Then, on the last third down, we were in a split-safety man to take away Jefferson and [Adam] Thielen and our corner doesn't sink, then Thielen gets inside of him. That's just poor technique. They got it into fourth-and-two and it should never have come to that. It's disappointing. That's why I talk about execution; we've got to coach and play better because that's a situation that favors us and we have to be able to get [QB] Justin [Herbert] the ball back for a chance to win the game. We didn't execute well enough in a defense that is designed to take away exactly what happened. We have to coach and play much better. But, our guys are playing hard. I think what we learned today, as a team, is that our execution wasn't good enough."

On defending the Vikings' pass-catchers:

"They have some quality receivers. Those two guys are as good as it gets. I felt like we rushed the passer well today. We just had some untimely misses in this game. You have to tip your cap to them. [Justin] Jefferson caught a couple of lobs. Those guys were earning their yards. Our plan was engineered to take them away. You have a running attack to deal with, too. We were really good in stretches and I really liked the way that we were playing in stretches, but you have to do it consistently over four quarters. We have a lot of young players out there, but that's no excuse. We have to execute better to get our offense more turns. The time of possession was big time in their favor today, it was like 36 [minutes] to 23. It felt that way. I know that at halftime, we had like 43 plays, and it felt that way. I felt like we were hanging tough. We just got to play better in all three phases and we have to execute better in the passing game. That pass defense isn't just pass coverage, it's pass rush and pass coverage. We have to keep putting them in good spots. I tip my cap to Justin [Jefferson] and [Adam] Thielen. Those guys are really good players. [Vikings QB] Kirk [Cousins] made some big throws in that game.

On what he can 'put his finger on' as to why the offense 'is not scoring in bunches like earlier in the season':

"I think we have to keep playing with more pace, more tempo, more rhythm and timing. I think that we have to avoid negative plays. From an execution standpoint, there were drops today that I didn't like. There were some untimely protection issues that I didn't like. There were some times where a play that is designed to go for a bunch, that should go for a bunch, doesn't. Our players and coaches, we have to execute better as a collective group. I think once we do, you guys have seen how we can play. But, with where we're at five and four, we're fighting every week. We're fighting to kind of find that rhythm and timing. It's not there yet. We're just not there yet. I think that our record is reflective of that. In all three phases, we're trying to find it. Our guys are playing hard, but our execution needs to improve.

On if there was an issue with the headsets today:

"There was. There was a huge headset issue."

On if opposing team's fans are impacting how the Chargers are performing at home:

"I think that it has more to do with the teams that we're playing. We have to execute better. The opposing crowd has no factor in our success. It's more about the Chargers and our level of execution. I think that it starts there for me.

On the headset issues:

"Most of the game. There was like a big stretch in the middle where my communication to the defensive signal-caller wasn't good. We had to swap them out. We had to have this wholesale change. They couldn't hear me. I couldn't hear them. We had to swap them out."

On if he 'thought about' going for it on fourth-and-two late in the fourth quarter rather than kicking the field goal:

"I did. I felt like the certainty of points, and to give ourselves a chance, I felt like, defensively, that we would get an opportunity for us to come back. Then, we would be able to score and then go for two to win. But, I felt like it was going to be a one-possession game. I felt like the certainty of points there was good. With time being on our side, I felt like we could get a possession back and we would be able to go down there and score a touchdown. We had all of our timeouts in the two-minute. I just felt like, in that circumstance, that was the right thing to do to truly make it a one-possession game."

On if the analytics model gave that decision 'a strong go that he went against':

"No. It was four yards. I just felt like the certainty of points was too good to pass up. Our kicker was kicking well. I just felt like, defensively, that we could get a stop. It was still going to be a one-possession game regardless. I just really wanted to make it a certain one-possession game. That's why I went for it."

On his thought process behind taking a delay of game penalty and punting on fourth-and-four in the first half:

“Just felt like the field position — in that circumstance, it was on the 44-ish [yard line], we pinned them down there. I really liked the way that our defense was playing. I felt like forcing a long field. Similar to last week in Philly, it was a similar thought process. Just felt like we didn’t want to let them shrink the field with a quality offense like that. Felt like we would put ourselves in a good position to flip the field. On the next drive, there were a couple of things defensively, some penalties, and they ended up kicking a field goal. I just felt strongly about the field position in that circumstance. From our modeling standpoint, it was kind of a 50/50 deal. Just felt like the field position was more important at that juncture.”

On the offense scoring on the opening drive of the second half:

“I loved that drive coming out of the halftime. I really felt like we were aggressive running the ball, throwing the football, staying ahead of it. Just felt like our guys were executing at a high level. I felt like our pace was good. I was a little surprised. We had these really good stretches, and then it felt like we were fighting to find it in other stretches. We just have to go back to work — we have to go back to work and find that that consistency because when we’ve executed like I know we can, we’ve been really tough to stop. That’s what we need to continue to strive for.”

On the time of possession difference:

“We lost the time possession today because of the way that we played on offense, not because of the way that we played on defense. We were playing really well on third down. They had a couple of critical third downs there towards the end of the game, but in the middle of the game, we were playing really, really well on third down. If you take a look at our offensive possessions in the first half, that’s more indicative of why they possessed the ball so much. There were a couple of penalties in there that allowed some drives, for them, to keep going. Special teams, we had a penalty. We forced a punt. We were in a good spot, then we had a block in the back — instead of being on the 20 [yard line], now we’re on the 10. It was all three phases today. Coaching and playing, we have to do better.”

On if OLB Chris Rumph’s taunting penalty was ‘fair’:

“I didn’t see it, so I can’t speak on that. I was told, but I can’t speak on that.”

On QB Justin Herbert’s performance today:

“I felt like, at times, he was playing with really good rhythm and timing. You saw a lot of confidence and a team was tough to stop. Then, I felt like there were other times where we just didn’t play with really good rhythm or timing. I feel like that’s where we can improve. I think when we were at our best today was when we were pushing the pace and we were staying on schedule and we were being aggressive on early downs. I feel like getting him on the move just really helps his game out. It helps our line out. I like that formula. I felt like that drive in the second half was a really good formula drive for us to start out the second half. They’re very well-coached on defense. They played a gutty game today because they had a lot of guys out, too. It was a gutty performance by those guys.”

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On the offense's performance today:

"Unfortunately, we came up short and didn't move the ball when we needed to. It falls on the offense to execute and do the things when we need to, but we just fell short today."

On not being able to convert on particular third downs in the second half:

"They are a good defense. They have a well-coached team and some really athletic players on the other side of the ball. We would love to go down and score on every single drive — we are obviously trying to do that — but we just need to execute better on third down and be more adamant about it. I felt like we had some good things, but also a lot of other things to clean up, as well."

On last week's performance compared to today's:

"That is just the NFL. Obviously, you want to win every game, but it is not going to happen like that. It is all about reacting to this adversity. It is tough to lose a game, especially after the game we had last week, but it is all about the preparation that we are going to have this week; to watch the film tomorrow, to be better from it and to learn from it because we cannot let this team beat us twice."

On the feeling of offensive cohesion:

"I think each game is different. We would love to be able to move the ball every single time and obviously, we are trying to do our best. We just need to be better at executing and it falls on us to put up more points, to move the ball when we need to and get the defense off the field. We did not do a good enough job today and that is, unfortunately, why we lost."

On how the team can improve:

"I think we need to keep being ourselves, to keep getting better, to keep learning and to keep growing. We are right where we need to be and as long as we have everything in front of us, continue to keep playing our type of football and keep getting better. Obviously, losing is never fun, but it is how we react and how we show up tomorrow to lifts and to film. I believe in this locker room and I know that our guys will show up and give their best effort."

On how the offensive success dictates the defense's performance:

"I think it is always huge for the offense to stay on the field to put those drives together. Whenever you go three-and-out, it is always tough to put the defense in that position because they get a stop and they have to come right back on the field, then they are gassed. I thought they did a great job at getting stops when they needed to. It is just up to us to execute better."

On the preparation for today's game:

"I feel like we were prepared. We did a good enough job of watching film on scouting those looks. The scout team gave us a great look all week. We did execute some pretty good third-down conversions, but I think, overall, we just need to put together a complete game."

On the interception:

"In hindsight, you are always going to want to say that you can put the ball in a better place. I thought he made a great play. That's a tough situation and one of those things where you need to just move on to your next read. That is one of those things that we will need to watch in film tomorrow and be pretty critical of."

On how he feels physically:

"I feel good."

On the offense's continuity:

"I think it is year one for this offense with everyone coming together from different teams. Year one is always going to be tough. There is no continuity from last year, so you have to learn an entirely new offense with new guys. I feel like we have done a great job of coming together. Obviously, there is going to be growing pains, but I feel like the guys show up and give their best effort every day. We are going to keep getting better and we are going to keep emphasizing that. We are right where we need to be."

MINNESOTA VIKINGS HEAD COACH MIKE ZIMMER

Opening statement:

“Nice win today. I thought our guys played very hard, as they typically do. We made some plays at the end. I thought, defensively, we played well all day. We got some good output from the specials team and returns and good kicks. Offensively, I thought we played much better in the second half. We had way too many penalties, offensively. We had to overcome first-and-20 probably three times. Defensively, we had one or two pass interferences, I think. We need to clean that up, but it’s nice to get a win and I’m glad we were able to get one today. Like I told the team, it takes a lot of courage to fight through adversity when everyone is shooting arrows at you. They came here to work and they fought like crazy all week like they always have. It finally paid off.”

On the strong defensive play with a lot of injuries:

“We had a lot of players missing today. [CB Patrick] Peterson, [LB Anthony] Barr, [S] Harrison Smith, [DT] Michael Pierce, [DE Danielle] Hunter. These guys battled today. I was proud of the way the corners played. They did a nice job, I thought. We did a good job for the most part in the running game, I think, too.”

On why QB Kirk Cousins taking deep shots:

“I think he had some shots early in the game that he didn’t take. I think he settled down and in the second half we got some single coverage. They were playing a lot of double coverage on [WR Adam] Thielen and [WR Justin] Jefferson on third downs. We finally got him in a place where we could get him some single coverage.”

On what a victory like this will do for the team:

“I got in the fourth quarter, right, I knew we had been there before a few times. I was just trying to figure out a way we were going to win the game. I told [Offensive Coordinator] Klint [Kubiak], ‘Be aggressive here and try to go score.’ Unfortunately we got a first-and-20 on that drive, then we were fourth-and-two. There is no way we were not going to try to win the game right there.”

On the offense wanting to get WR Justin Jefferson more involved:

“He [Offensive Coordinator Klint Kubiak] shouldn’t be telling that to the media. I did talk to Justin this week and I told him we’re going to get him the ball. I said, ‘You have to do something for me, and that’s to come out here and practice real hard and do the things you are supposed to do. Study and be precise in your routes and we’re going to get you the ball.’”

On the four-minute mode they were in at the end of the game:

“It was to the point where it really wasn’t four-minute. I didn’t care about four-minute. I wanted the ball in our hands. That was really what we were trying to do — try to go score if we needed to and clock that down. They used their timeouts and we were able to win the game.”

On his confidence in Jefferson:

“He always shows up. He didn’t get many balls last week. I know that he was very frustrated. I meet with [Kirk] Cousins every week and I tell him what we need to try to do. [WR Adam] Thielen made a great catch on third-and-18 or third-and-20 or something. He made 18 yards. We got two guys that are really tough competitors — three guys, really, with [RB Dalvin] Cook. So, we need to make sure that we are continually getting these guys the ball.”

On no interceptions for Cousins:

“It’s big. I do think that sometimes he needs to be aggressive with the football. I thought he was today, especially in the second half. He has to trust everybody. If he has to hum a couple in there and it gets tipped or something, so be it. That’s why we are a team.”

On if he met with Cousins about getting specific players the ball more:

“No. We talk about a lot of different things. We watch some of the third downs together and we talk a little about football. He will ask me questions about defense and I will talk to him about things I see on the tape from the other team. Sometimes we just talk about football and kind of where we are, what we need to do. It’s nothing like — I’ll throw some hints in there — and he will hint to me a little bit, too.”

On Cousins taking more chances with Jefferson:

"I think sometimes, I talk to him during the game — one time he came off and I said, 'What did you see during that play? I think you had that guy beat.' And he said, 'Yeah, I didn't see him quick enough.' I think just the reinforcement of some of those kinds of things. But if you have second-and-18 or whatever it is, we have to get the ball down the field. You can't throw five-yard throws. Some of those are dictated by the game situation and, unfortunately, penalties."

On if he gets joy from a strong defensive win:

"That's a good question. I like it when we go into a game short-handed defensively and play well. I do like that, but I like to win. The players know that I hate to lose. We talked about it this week, how much I hate it and how hard we work, how hard we compete, how hard we study during the week and practice. We have to start seeing the benefits of it."

On their defensive depth concerns and the young guys who stepped up:

"We had a lot of rotation in the defensive line today, especially after playing 98 plays last week. I really think the corners did a nice job of challenging these guys. These are two really good receivers and the tight end is a good player, too. I thought we did a nice job. The interception by [LB Eric] Kendricks was big-time. I thought that was a heck of a deal. The sack that he had earlier in the game was big, too, because they got out of that protection. They actually changed a bunch of protections during the game on third down and we had a couple other pressures that we had to get to."

On the fake punt:

"He snapped it before the official said it was ready for play."

On why they went for it on fourth down:

"I thought they [the Chargers] would go for it on fourth down a lot more than they did today. I just told the team we are going to be aggressive. If we get beat because we run a fake punt and we don't get it, then we just have to suck it up and stop them on defense."

On RB Dalvin Cook:

"Dalvin is an extremely resilient and competitive person. He is a great team leader. I'm proud of him. I love the way he plays. I love the heart that he brings. He is one of my favorite players of all time."

MINNESOTA VIKINGS QUARTERBACK KIRK COUSINS

Opening statement:

“Great to get a win against a good football team. I thought it was a hard-fought game. We were pretty balanced today. It was good to run the football well and have productive runs. I thought we spread the ball around, completed a lot of passes to different guys. I thought our defense did a great job of getting us the ball back. I thought special teams did an awesome job. Obviously, [Vikings WR] Dede’s [Westbrook] punt return, disappointing we didn’t get points off of it, but just tremendous to be able to put us in a position. We certainly left some points out there in two specific scenarios that I can think of. The two fourth-down conversions were big; one for a touchdown and one to be able to kneel out the game. I thought [Vikings WR] Adam [Thielen] and [Vikings WR] Justin [Jefferson] did a phenomenal job making plays for us down the field. Just proud of the way we played and found a way to win.”

On playing more aggressively:

“I’m pretty methodical. I sense what you’re saying in terms of there were a few play calls where maybe we were trying to take shots, but there were also some times where we got deeper shells and I still had to check it down to [Vikings FB] C.J. Ham or to [Vikings RB] Alex [Mattison] or whoever. I do feel we were aggressive for the most part. I think it did give a few more opportunities to go down the field.”

On having more opportunities to throw over the middle:

“I think the one to Adam [Thielen] on third-down was under pressure, so I was hot and he was my hot throw. They avoided the middle of the field on the deeper one to Adam on the last third down of the game. It was just a two-deep shell [coverage] and that was where the void was. They did play a fair amount of split-safety. I guess that was just kind of where my reads took me.”

On Vikings WR Justin Jefferson:

“He’s such a great football player that it’s just important that we target him, get the ball in his hands and let him make plays. He showed why he’s a great player again today.”

On Jefferson’s development as a receiver and their chemistry:

“I don’t really know if Justin’s developed, I think he came to us as a pretty good player. He’s just been that way ever since. Certainly, you feel a rapport with him over time and better understand him as a player, better understand what he’s capable of. I think that rapport will only continue to grow in the games up ahead. I love getting to play with both him and Adam [Thielen]. We’ve got so many guys I can talk about who make great plays for us.”

On if he saw a different look on defense today ‘where he felt more confident’ throwing to Jefferson in double coverage:

“Most of the times I worked him, he was not doubled. Most of the times I didn’t work him, he was. So, I guess they didn’t double him, just enough to give us the opportunities to give him the ball. They were pretty intentional about putting a safety over the top of where he was lining up and we had to get creative with the routes he would run and how we could still get him the football.”

On making aggressive plays on fourth down:

“I felt both fourth-down calls were great. I think that we needed both of them, too, to be able to win that game. It’s not so much aggressive play-calling on fourth-down as much as it is what you call on first, second, and third-down. You also open yourself up to some more sacks and some more risky situations too, so you’ve got to be willing to live with that. But, I think more often than not, when you are aggressive, good plays are going to be made.”

On Vikings Head Coach Mike Zimmer’s message to the team this week about losing:

“It’s never going to sit well with him. It gives us all kind of a pit in our stomach. All week long, it hurts. I don’t sleep well for several days after a loss. Football is so much more fun when you’re winning. This week will be. You’ll have that wind at your back a little bit more, but we better start stringing some together.”

On what the win means for the team moving forward:

"I think you just continue to mature as a football team naturally through the season and this was another opportunity to do that. I thought our defense did a tremendous job [despite] missing so many players, key players for us. I think there's a lot to be said for the way they played today and kept getting us the ball back.

On the Vikings fans in attendance today:

"It's so awesome. I don't know how to say it. It's such a privilege to play for a team that when you go on the road, you know you're going to see purple and yellow in the stands; just tremendous. Not every team gets that. I'm grateful for it. Not only that, but when we play at home, you just don't see a lot of visitors at our home game because our Vikings fans buy the tickets. It's just tremendous. We're blessed."