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Chargers Media Availability

Monday, November 28, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On injury updates following yesterday's game:

"[C] Corey Linsley is in the concussion protocol. [T] Trey Pipkins [III] had a reaggravation of his MCL injury, and he is going to be day-to-day. A lot of bumps and bruises, otherwise."

On if there is 'anything new' regarding the injury statuses of OLB Joey Bosa and WR Mike Williams:

"Nothing new to report."

On QB Justin Herbert's performance yesterday and his 'passing yards per attempt' figure this year:

"It's a combination of factors. It's a combination of how defenses are playing us. It's a combination of the transition within our offense, from a personnel standpoint, and trying to play to the strengths of our team that is out there in a given week, which you guys have heard me comment on extensively throughout the season. What we're having to do is find a way that fits that group week to week. We're certainly better when we get them, but you can get them in a variety of ways that don't exclusively come from just throwing the ball deep down the field — explosions can happen in a lot of different ways — but we're certainly better when we get them, we know that. I thought that, yesterday, Justin [Herbert] was outstanding in the game. I thought that he was accurate. I thought that he made a lot of winning plays that quarterbacks have to make. All we're going to do is continue to feature our players the best way that we know how. You've heard me say it a lot that the design of the play, and then the result of the play, are two different things. When a team is playing a two-deep [safety] zone, or some type of shell coverage where there are seven guys that are deep into coverage, and you have something that is designed to go deep down the field, then you have to check it down. That's going to take away your air yards, which is a real popular topic here — air yards — which is one of the remarkable, new concepts to football. When you check it down, that is going to, obviously, take your air yards down. When you throw an RPO [run-pass option], it's going to take your air yards down. But, the result is that you're trying to move the chains. We're living that movie right now. I thought that our team did enough yesterday, offensively, to win — certainly in the passing game. For Justin [Herbert] to have 47 attempts and no turnovers yesterday, fumbles or interceptions, those are the statistics that really matter in winning and losing. I think that he is doing a great job of that. Still getting the high-level production — three touchdowns, playing well in the red zone, playing well in two-minute — those are all things that I'm looking at, in terms of the passing game."

On if the team 'identified which play' Linsley sustained an injury on yesterday:

"No, I don't know, specifically. There's speculation, in terms of when it may have happened, but it was certainly on that drive that we scored on."

On if Herbert 'is dealing with something in his left ankle':

"No, he just got kicked in the shin."

On improving in run defense:

“We had to tackle better yesterday. We, certainly, missed some tackles that contributed to some big gains — or bigger gains, I should say. It’s just playing team defense. Yesterday, our tackling on the perimeter was at the heart of a lot of the plays. I think that they were trying to get the ball to the perimeter. I thought that our fits inside were fine. The balls were on the edge. That’s where we got hurt yesterday. Then, certainly, the quarterback running, that’s going to impact your [run yardage] total when he runs for 56 yards. He had the one designed run at the beginning of the second half, which is kind of like a schemed run. Hats off to them, good scheme. But, your total is going to be impacted that way. Then, with [Cardinals RB James] Conner, I think that there were three runs there that contributed to bigger gains that we just didn’t tackle very well at the point of attack.”

On ‘more broadly and more philosophically’ detailing the run defense:

“You have to assess each matchup. Philosophically, it’s going to be about the matchup and where you feel like the matchup is within the game. When you take a look at Arizona, they have like five first-round receivers on their team, so you have to look at the matchups both ways. You just know that it takes a lot of five-yard runs to equal a 40-yard pass, and you have to start with that premise. It will always be that way. Now, where I’ve been — where we’ve been number one in the NFL and top-10 in the NFL — then, both places are working well at the same time. I think that when you suffer some attrition — obviously, things change from a personnel perspective — you have to go into the game and play that game the way that you need to play it. We need to play better up front in the run game — and that’s all 11 guys; it’s not just the front. It’s all 11 guys. Like I told you, you can fit the run perfectly — you know, an eight-man fit, perfectly fit — and the ball gets to the corner and he has to make a tackle. What we have to try and do is create as many two-on-ones in the run game where there are two guys on the ball, so that it doesn’t come down to a secondary player because that minimizes gains — yards after contact, all of that good stuff. There are going to be some designs where DBs have to tackle, and they have to tackle. Yesterday, we held them to 190 [yards] throwing it with all of those receivers and that quarterback [Cardinals QB Kyler Murray] out there. Broadly, if you take a look at the NFL and run defense, in terms of where everyone is ranked and what they give up, the disparity between run yards and passing yards is huge. If you’re the 24th-ranked run defense versus the 24th-ranked pass defense, go look at the difference. That’s what it is in the NFL, and it’s the same way on offense. No one talks about run offense. If you’re top-five in the NFL in passing, but let’s say you’re bottom-five in running, you’re always going to gain a lot more yards than a team that runs for a lot and doesn’t throw for very many. That’s our standpoint, just globally, in how we look at it. Anyway, you asked me that question, and I tried to answer it like I always do.”

On ‘finding the right combination of run and pass offensively’:

“Philosophically, it’s your job, as the head coach, to be able to establish what you just talked about. I think that’s what we’ve done all year. Even if the run game isn’t producing the output that maybe you hope, it’s also producing a different effect, in terms of the passing game and protecting your line and protecting your quarterback. Yesterday, I thought that we had some timely we runs later in the game, where you’re taking advantage of some light boxes and taking advantage of some personnel groupings that give you an edge in running the ball. We’re still continuing to find the right formula. At the same time, to me, it boils down to the matchups. It’s such a matchup league. You have to fit the matchup of who you’re playing against. You have to fit the matchup of who is paying for you. When those things are changing all of the time, you’re going to be trying to find it. I think that we’ve done as good of a job as we can, and I’m hoping that we can continue to improve as the season goes on, that we can keep getting healthy with our skill position players. Right now, we’re at a stage where the output in the running game hasn’t been effective, from a statistical standpoint, but I think that the way that we have tried to run the ball and commit to running the ball, it has allowed us to play a certain way in the passing game.”

On the kickoff team’s ‘mortar kick’ on the final kickoff:

“You want some flight on the football that allows your coverage time to get down there. You also want it to be in a location where you can populate the football. You saw their response, protecting for an onside-type kick. They got into a middle formation. That allows you to spread out and then net [cover] the football. What you are trying to do is not have to defend multiple plays at the end of the game. By taking time off the clock, you have to defend less downs, and they had a timeout, certainly. We wanted to make sure some clock ran off and we had to defend less plays.”

On how the decision to execute a mortar kick is made:

“Myself, [Special Teams Coordinator] Ryan [Ficken] and [Assistant Special Teams Coach] Chris Gould, us talking through it during the two-point play. Then, after we made it, just that sequencing because there is some thought that you can kick it out [of the end zone] because they do have the timeout. I wanted that clock to run. I feel like, me studying the game, you want to limit the amount of times that offense can touch the football at the end of the game.”

On if he would ‘call for a mortar kick in the same situation every time or if it depends on the opposing team’:

“Who is back there certainly matters, to an extent. Then, who you have covering your kicks, if you feel good about your kickoff team. A general way of looking at it, if you can run the clock, that’s an advantage for you, defensively, for sure, in closing out the game.”

On if calling screen passes was a response to the Cardinals blitzing:

“Yes. A lot of different pressures, and then a lot of zone defense in behind it. I felt like that would be a good adjustment in the game. I thought that it was effective for us.”

On WR DeAndre Carter:

“He’s been an invaluable player for us. Just a true example of a professional. He’s an example of who we want to try to build this football team with because he does so many things for us. He plays a lot of different positions. As you mentioned, he is our returner in both phases. He has just made a lot of winning plays for us the entire season and he has been there for us in the clutch. He has earned the trust of Justin [Herbert] and our offensive coaches in every way. Then, certainly, in terms of the special teams culture, I think you are seeing he has had an outstanding year on punt returns for us. I think you can see his experience and his play-making ability express itself in that phase for us. As you guys saw yesterday with that 20-yard return, was really big for us. Just a consummate pro and super excited that he plays for us.”

On CB Michael Davis and his injury that occurred in practice:

“He was just defending a ‘9’ route on the sideline. He went up for it and there was a collision there, kind of. I think it was more like just scary than anything. I think it happened on the way up, but he was OK. It was touch-and-go there for a second, and then he was OK. We all knew he was OK on Friday, that he was going to be fine. You’re waiting on Saturday to see how he is feeling and stuff like that. He came out of the game OK. I just thought he covered well. I thought he tackled well yesterday and just showed a lot of toughness. I feel like, I said it in my speech, I really wish he had that interception at the end because it just would have capped a really, I thought, quality performance by him. I think as a coach you are always trying to point out the example of your players playing tough and rugged and doing it right and I thought that he played well yesterday.”

On Chargers fans traveling and the impact that their presence has:

“It was significant. I am not blown away anymore by it because I think, you guys that were in Atlanta three weeks ago, when we went to Atlanta, there was a huge contingent. I know that when we took the lead, there was just that chant that came out at the Atlanta game. I think what is awesome about our brand and our fanbase is that you know that it is growing because it is going everywhere. It’s going on an East Coast game in Atlanta, a daytime game. It’s going to Arizona. You really see that powder blue. It’s hard to miss when you go to an opposing stadium. I know that we had it at Houston. That is another game that stood out. I mean, shoot, when I was back home at Cleveland, you saw a bunch of powder blue. It means a lot and I think that our fans are seeing how we play, hopefully, and falling in love with all of our players. There are a lot of great players to root for. Hopefully, they know how much we appreciate them.”

On S JT Woods:

“He’s getting better. He is learning. You see a little bit more trigger from him, a little bit more confidence. As I told you guys, he’s going to learn more every time he plays and that is what we need. Did a good job for us on special teams. If you take a look at his special teams reps, he was involved in special teams yesterday and did a nice job. Just continuing to improve, experience more, and hopefully each game he gets a little bit better.”

On QB Justin Herbert's decision-making:

"This guy is a premium decision-maker, as you guys know. In terms of the fewest amount of turnover-worthy plays and stuff like that from last year, being a high-volume thrower as a second-year player, it was just remarkable. It's the same way this year. Even though there has been attrition both ways — O-line, skill players — you trust him so much because he can see the field, he can feel the rush, he is strong with the ball. He really, I thought, with a lot of pressure yesterday, really performed well, especially in two-minute."

On CB Bryce Callahan:

"Bryce [Callahan] had a lot of quality coverage reps. He went toe-to-toe with [Cardinals WR Marquise] Hollywood [Brown] a few times. A couple in the deep part of the field. I thought that one of the big reasons why we won the game yesterday is we kept the passing game in check. You guys know, that is a really prolific group over there. You are talking about [Cardinals WR DeAndre] Hopkins and [Cardinals WR] A.J. Green, Hollywood Brown and [Cardinals WR] Robbie Anderson, who is one of the top deep threats in the league. You have [Cardinals TE] Trey McBride, who is a second-round pick tight end. They have a really quality group over there and I felt like we were able to really put a roof on the coverage. He played really well down the stretch. I thought that in the fourth quarter, he played really, really well. I think that is a big reason why we won the game."

On the defense's performance in the fourth quarter:

"I thought that we just executed. I thought our execution in those final four drives were indicative of how we can play, how we have played at times this season. That is exciting for me because you want to play your best in the clutch. All of those possessions at the end, in the fourth quarter, were all must-have possessions. The thing about it is there were three-and-outs, too, so we were able to get the momentum back. We were able to get the field position back. I think you see how impactful three-and-outs are. The more three-and-outs that you can generate for your offense, the better. I think that is what really happened in that fourth quarter is just a high level of execution, guys playing together, and I felt like you didn't see any mental errors. You didn't see any physical errors. You didn't see any missed tackles. You saw tough and rugged at the line of scrimmage. You saw people covering, people with good technique and fundamentals. Generally, when you execute like that, you are going to get results like that."

On S Alohi Gilman:

"I thought [S] Alohi [Gilman] was really solid. I thought his angles were good. I thought he tackled really well yesterday. He was one of our most productive players in the game. He had the huge pass breakup on [Cardinals TE Trey] McBride on the third down, which was a must-have third-down situation. He really owned his leverage on that route and was able to glove it. That is what we need from safeties. Where we play [S] Derwin [James Jr.], we have to have quality safety play opposite of him when he goes other places. Lo was able to play strong and tough yesterday for us."