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## Chargers Media Availability

**Monday, November 8, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.**

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On if plays designed for QB Justin Herbert to throw ‘outside of the pocket’ were called more yesterday than games prior:**

“I think as much, perhaps a little bit more. We felt like that would be a good strategy against that front. I felt like there were a lot of completion plays within those types of designs and that it would also change the launch point so that those rushers wouldn’t be able to get into a rhythm. That was a big part of the game plan. I felt like it was a winning edge for us yesterday. I think it’s fair to say that maybe a little bit more, but it’s always in our thought process. It may have expressed itself more yesterday.”

#### **On the strategy behind designing plays for Herbert to execute outside of the pocket and if those play designs ‘limit parts of the field’:**

“It can. Sometimes, if there’s an edge player that sniffs the play out, you can be kind of oh-for there. That’s always the downside, is that you kind of limited, maybe, some of the possibilities for the quarterback. But, I think that, in weighing the return on the investment in terms of changing the launch point and really increasing the variables for their rushers, in terms of what you have to defend — where they can’t always expect the launch point to be in the same spot every single time, and that they have to definitely commit to the run and the pass, and then you have multiple types of passes and multiple types of runs — we feel like that is the way that you have to play against a quality front. You really have to force them to play the game, and to read it out and play it straight up. That was a big part of our plan last week.”

#### **On Herbert’s ability to ‘throw on the run’ yesterday:**

“Very big strength of his. He’s a very natural thrower on the move. He can throw it short and intermediate-deep, and right or left. He’s a guy that can go either way with it, too. It’s an advantage for us, for sure. We want to be able to do that with him because I know, defensively, the amount of pressure that it puts on you from an edge standpoint. Then, from a coverage standpoint, that second level, it really puts a lot of pressure on you to match things up off of the play-action pass.”

#### **On if LB Kenneth Murray Jr. will be activated off of Reserve/Injured; Designated for Return this week:**

“That’s certainly our hope. He practiced last week. He was in all of those practices and we expect him to be a full participant in the practices this week. We’ll just see how he practices and how he responds to truly being up with our defense. Last week, he took on more of the service team, the work team, reps, and then he got a couple of defensive reps in there. We’re going to try to get him involved in the gameplan and see how his body responds to full defensive-type reps, and then go from there.”

**On the defense's performance against the run yesterday:**

"I thought that when their running backs were running the football, I felt like we played tough against the run. I thought that the loose plays from the quarterback — you know, there were 50 of them from the quarterback, which inflated the run totals; I think we had 126 [yards allowed] on 32 carries by everybody else, which would be like 3.9 [yards per carry], which is a quality number for us. But, because of the loose plays — we had a quarterback on third down and three scrambles on third down — that allowed them to run a lot more plays. Some of those totals, they obviously increased a little bit in the run game. They had 10 more points as a result of the quarterback getting out. I felt like we had a lot of good moments yesterday. There were a lot of good examples of us playing tough and rugged in there against the run. We have one run that [Eagles RB] Jordan Howard split us on — the 18-yard run — in a really good run structure, which I didn't like, but outside of that, we were playing tough. The story yesterday, for me, was just finishing on the quarterback."

**On the idea that opposing offenses are 'running the ball often to keep the ball out of the Chargers offense's possession' and if that is 'concerning':**

"I definitely don't want them to possess the ball like that and keep it away from our quarterback, that's for sure. I don't think that you're reading into anything. I think that you're seeing it the way it is. On that specific drive that you're referring to, I think that there are some close calls in there that we need to perform better. Again, I wasn't disappointed in that drive, so to speak. I feel like we're getting better every time we go out there. I feel like we're truly learning about who we really are and where we need to go. There were some things yesterday that I think helped us, that we can learn a lot from moving forward. I think what we have to do a good job of, much to like what we talked about last week with the first- and second-down offense, is on first- and second-down run defense, we have to get negative plays. That is what is not happening at the point of attack right now. That's what we need to search more for, those negative plays that can get us in a known passing situation. That hasn't happened enough for us so far this season. I think that is what will take our entire defense to a different level because I like the way that we competed yesterday in the game without a bunch of guys. In the passing game, a couple of those plays I wish that we had back. To me, yesterday, the story was the quarterback on third down scrambling and the loose plays. That was kind of our biggest priority going into the game, which was disappointing. We didn't execute that portion of the plan. Had we done that, we're looking at a really productive day. But at the same time, it shows you that there's still a lot of room to improve."

**On if Eagles QB Jalen Hurts' ability to scramble for first downs was due to 'pretty blatant holds' by the Eagles offensive line or lack of execution by the pass-rushers:**

"I think that you said it well. I would say that I don't have anything more to add. I think that both of those things are in play there. Because I coach that position and I know that it's not an easy job, especially against someone that's as talented as Jalen [Hurts], you don't have a true sense of how deep that he bails to the right until you're out there. It's very difficult to simulate in practice. That's a tough lesson that we had to learn yesterday. I'm glad that we learned it. You guys know the mobility that's out there in the NFL. Those days of the quarterback being one spot, it's over. That's long gone. That's why it's incumbent upon you that your edges are secure, not only in the pass rush, but then in the read game, because it's just a big part of the game. You can't just pin your ears back anymore and play against some of these premium quarterbacks; Jalen Hurts, [Cardinals QB] Kyler Murray, [Seahawks QB] Russell Wilson, [Texans QB] Deshaun Watson, [Bills QB] Josh Allen, [Ravens QB] Lamar Jackson, Justin Herbert — you just keep going. You're like, 'Well, this is here to stay.' This is where the game is. We have to thrive when playing against a guy like that because we're going to play people like that moving forward. I do think that there are some good lessons there to learn. Yeah, I feel like a couple of those calls could have helped us, too. We also have to know who we are playing against. We're not going to use the officials as an excuse for anything."

**On the play calls on the offense's opening possession:**

“On the [third down] duo [call] with the tag to [WR] Mike [Williams], I felt like if Justin [Herbert] had thrown it on time, that may have been a different result. Like you said, I did feel like there was a grab there. [Eagles CB Darius] Slay [Jr.] covered it pretty good, but I think that if we had thrown it on time, I think it could have been different. The run, I felt like they fit the run well on that particular play. They kind of sold out for it — if you watch [Eagles DE Derek] Barnett, he really dives in there. It wasn't the design for Justin to keep it, but we probably would have won the edge there. The play to Mike, it should be a walk-in [touchdown]. [WR] Jalen Guyton blocked the wrong guy. He should have blocked the man on top of him and forced the corner to make the tackle. It's a really good design, so that's an execution error. The play to [WR] Keenan [Allen], that's [former Saints QB] Drew Brees to [former Saints WR] Lance Moore in the Super Bowl [XLIV] against Indianapolis. We're going to take our chances with Keenan on that. It's just one of those where they defended it very well. I tip my cap to J.G. [Eagles Defensive Coordinator Jonathan Gannon] and Slay — [Eagles S] Rodney McLeod was over there, too. They played it well. You tip your cap to them on that one. As it relates to the toss-crack, it was one of those sorts of spontaneous calls for us. It's one of those calls that you're trying to win the edge. [G] Matt [Feiler] just kind of lost the linebacker a little bit. I kind of wish [RB] Josh [Kelley] would have chased [T] Rashawn [Slater] a little bit more. It was a good play by them. It was one of those deals where you tip your cap. I wasn't disappointed with it at all when it came out of his mouth. It's just one of those calls where if it works, then you're excited about it. We had the coverage system that we wanted against a single-safety [personnel]. They were in single safety and their linebacker just kind of went over the top. If Josh had kept going, I think you probably get a bloody two-yard run there and then you're moving. But he kind of cut back and 57 [Eagles LB T.J. Edwards] made a good play. That sequence, as a play-caller, you're always saying, 'Hey, in this inventory, I could have done more.' But, I know that from a head-coaching standpoint, I wasn't disappointed in either of those decisions by [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi], for sure. I just wish that we had a different result. Like I said, we're going to be aggressive. In our models, those are definitely, 'go for it.' The goal-line play resulted in a short field that we ended up scoring on. That fourth-and-two on the toss, that was not a total, 'go,' like a 'no-brainer,' but it was, 'either-or.' I just really felt like, because of the way we were playing, we really wanted to score a touchdown there. It didn't go down.”

**On S Nasir Adderley:**

“I think the concept trigger and the ball-hawking mindset comes when you're truly comfortable, and you're in that true rhythm as a player. You're so confident in what you're doing schematically and technique-wise on your own side, and then you're sure of what's happening on the other side. I think Nas is still growing there. I think he's still getting there in terms of that ball-hawking, intercepting the football, being around the ball, knocking the ball out, forcing takeaways. I think he's certainly capable of it. And he and I were talking this morning about it, and we just have to keep coaching the guy. He's so willing, we have to stay with him. Just being new in our defense, I think he's learning a lot. I know we're glad we have him. He made a big split playing special teams yesterday, and it's about evening out some of the rough edges in his game. But I expect him to keep improving — he's working hard at it.”

**On the offensive line:**

“You want to see your guys respond as competitors and going into that game, we knew it was a mindset game. Normally, when you go into a competitive venue like that, you're going to need your fronts to play well in the game. I felt like our mindset on defense, our front came ready to play. Inside, [DL] Linval [Joseph], [DL] Jerry [Tillery], [DL] Justin [Jones] and [DL] Cov [Christian Covington] — they came ready to play. And then our O-line came ready to play. We knew it was going to be a fourth quarter fight and I think the way we ran the football on the last drive was a great example of that mindset that we're talking about. Running the football and protecting the quarterback is a team job and it's such a chemistry-type position, the offensive line. [G/T] Michael [Schofield III] and [T] Storm [Norton] just really responded as a tandem yesterday and those other guys on the left side and center really paved the way for a complete performance from our football team. It was a bloody kind of rushing game. We had 27 for 89; but that commitment really served us well throughout the football game. They'll be some people who will look down on some of those two or three-yard runs, and they say, 'Okay, you're not getting the same production. Why don't you just let [QB] Justin [Herbert] throw it?' And it's a valid question and talking point. But what I think it forces defenses to do is to defend more. It forces them to defend more, and I felt like our O-line forced that defense to defend more plays yesterday. That's what ultimately allowed us to have such a big day, offensively. If we can finish some of those drives in the first half, I think we're saying, 'Man, that was a pretty special performance.’”

**On ball control:**

“You can feel it. Conversely, I felt like against Baltimore that we didn’t have it. I knew we were out there a lot on defense, and I felt it. I felt that in that ball game. And I felt that in the Kansas City game we really possessed the ball. We controlled that football game. In the Vegas game, we control the game. That’s always a good feeling. It means, No. 1, you’re playing well on early downs. You’re keeping the chains moving, you’re making first downs. Yesterday, we were five out of 10 on third down. But those 10 third downs weren’t impossible — they were all makeable in a loud environment. I just really liked how we played offensively. And then defensively, if we’d performed better on the loose plays with the quarterback, we would’ve really dominated the time of possession. Because a lot of those third downs allowed them to extend the drives. I feel like there’s another gear we can get to as a total team, but it’s an advantage anytime you can dictate the terms of the game. I was really proud of the way we played offensively. Our field position was in our favor yesterday. I felt like we did a great job on special teams yesterday.”

**On RB Austin Ekeler:**

“On that last drive, he caught that choice route on second down and made a guy miss — first down. It gets you that first down to get you moving — he broke a tackle. Just the physicality he played with on the draw play, there was just a really physical finish on a run that was big time. And then, when we had to have it on a fourth-and-one, we were able to get it and he splits the big run there to get us in there tight. That’s just the type of player he is, that’s the type of competitor he is. He’s got that mindset we talked about taking the field yesterday and it felt like he was a good embodiment of a complete performance yesterday for us offensively.”

**On CB Ryan Smith:**

“The early diagnosis is a torn ACL.”

**On G Senio Kelemete:**

“Senio’s a pro’s pro. He was with [Run Game Coordinator/OL] Frank [Smith] and [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi] in New Orleans; he’s been around a lot of good football. He was in San Francisco with some guys we really respect and has brought a veteran presence and a guy that gives you that jumbo element. But also, he gives you some flexibility in terms of where he can play on the line. He’s just been a pro’s pro since he got here, just doing some of those utility jobs for us and I’m really proud of the guy.”

**On being 5-3 through Week 10:**

“I think we’ve earned the exact record we have right now. Our record is a reflection of where we’re at as a football team. I think yesterday was a good example of why you can’t look at any type of picture, except for what’s in front of you this week. Because it’s a week-to-week league, and it’s a matchup league. You just have to treat each week like it has a life of its own and if you’re trying to think beyond that, you’re going to miss something. In my short time in the NFL — yesterday just being a prime example of it, in terms of the matchups and results — you have to focus on your team and focus on improvement. Yesterday, we won a game — a tough game, a hard-fought game. But there’s so much to learn from that we need to take with us this week against Minnesota. In terms of where we’re at halfway, we still have a lot of room to improve as a team, in all three phases. And we’ve seen some good improvement in all three phases; but we need to keep that coming to life by working hard and being really intentional on first and second down run defense, getting negative plays. Last week, it was first and second down offense — trying to be on schedule. With the kicking game it’s your coverage teams, your return unit. Just making all those improvements and staying at it and that’s what we’re trying to do here.”

**On the injury status of DL Christian Covington and T Bryan Bulaga:**

“Cov made it through the game. I know he was sore, but he made it through the game. We’ll know more today in terms of how he’s responding, but I think he’s going to be okay — sore more than anything. And then I saw Bryan out there working out with [Associate Athletic Trainer] Marco [Zucconi] earlier on. He’s back at it in terms of being out there on the grass, working out. I just think how that time frame expresses itself, we’ll see. But he’s out there on the grass working out and getting into the swing of things. Hopefully he keeps working hard and we can get him back as soon as possible. His time frame is much different.”

**On fourth quarter comebacks starting with Week 1 against Washington:**

“That team was dangerous then and they were playing with a ton of confidence. To be able to execute like that on that last drive against a front that good — against the No. 2 defense in the National Football League the year before — I think gave us great confidence to possess the ball, make three third downs finish the game with the ball and not give it back to them. Then you lose your right tackle, during the game; it was a real character win for us. It showed us what we’re made of. Moving forward, we’ve just been in a ton of tight games. I think yesterday, after two tough loses — one of which we lost in the fourth quarter to New England — there you are in the fourth quarter again. For [QB] Justin [Herbert] to play like that, coming off two tough games. For our offensive line to respond like they did after two tough games. For our clutch players like [WR] Keenan [Allen], [RB] Austin [Ekeler], [WR] Mike [Williams]. For as many guys to touch the football in a game like is a quality win for us. It does create confidence, and it was a complete effort by coaches and players. It was a Chargers win. That’s what makes me excited as a coach.”

**On the offensive scheme:**

“We felt like we would be able to capture the edge against some of their structures and get the ball to the perimeter. And you have to realize where their best players are — their best players are inside with [DT Javon] Hargrave and [DT] Fletcher [Cox]. It just felt like winning the edge would accomplish two things — get it away from their best two players, but also force their edge defenders to have to worry about more scheme. If their edge defenders are team-off on you, then that is not a recipe for success. But if they’re worried about who’s around them, like, ‘Hey is this a crack? Hey, is this a keeper? Am I getting butch nudged?’ That’s how you have to play against a team like that, that’s built the way they are. Some of those perimeter runs were successful, some of them weren’t, but some of them lead to other good offense that doesn’t show up on the stat sheet. Sometimes you’re setting up plays, and that’s what we tried to do yesterday.”

**On QB Justin Herbert’s mobility:**

“He does; most of it is expressed in the call as an option within the play. But if Justin sees it, he can roll with [a sneak].”

**On Herbert’s impact on the offensive scheme:**

“What we’re trying to do is take full advantage of his gifts. And I think when you can access places on the field that some can’t, you have to do that, you have to explore that. It opens up so much more for your offense and it really changes the way defenses play you and assess you. A strength of Justin’s is his arm and accuracy in the deep part of the field. A strength of [WR] Mike Williams is his ability to judge and track it in the deep part of the field. Sometimes, a one-on-one down the field — even if he’s not wide open, but if it’s a one on one down the field — we feel like that is an advantage situation. If it’s 50 to 60 yards down the field, we feel like there’s a lot of good that can happen on offense. You catch it, they foul, or it’s incomplete. Those things aren’t bad for an offense. What it does is it forces people to say, ‘Hey, you can get there.’ We feel like that has an impact on the way we can play moving forward. That’s good design there to get [WR] Mike [Williams] on his good route. And then the accuracy on the throw and the tracking is a great play by both those two guys.”

**On ‘negative plays’ on defense:**

“Just putting them in positions where they can be really aggressive within the particular context of our different personal packages and structures that we play. Creating more opportunities for these guys to make impactful plays at the point of attack. I think that’s something we need to take a look at, and I think that’s something that hasn’t happened for us just yet. It can really help us moving forward.”

**On mobile quarterbacks:**

“It’s premium because you can’t have 280-pound guys on the edge anymore, because they can’t catch these guys. That’s just the reality, those days are over. Whether the quarterback is in one spot, and you can’t have those big defensive ends because those guys can’t grab the flags off these quarterbacks now. You have to have people that can play on their feet at the edge now because of the mobility of the quarterbacks and the passing game. In the quarterback read game, you have to play on your feet and key diagnose. There is a bunch of stuff going on with guys coming back at your knees, arc, bluffs — you have to manage a lot more on the edge than ever before. Athleticism is at a premium, and so is length. Because that’s how you cut the field with guys who are long, arm length, and guys that are athletic on the edge that is where the game is. That’s going to be something for the modern NFL, that’s just what it is. You have to respond to what you are defending and who you are defending. That’s just part of the game.”

**On the defense against mobile quarterbacks:**

“All four of those guys that are playing for us can play on the edge. A lot of it’s that educational process for what it takes. There used to be an old way of thinking. You just dent heads, rush the passer. It’s not a big deal if you lose contain, it’s not a big deal if you squeeze too far in because there is not a consequence to that. Now, there are real consequences to you not playing the game the right way. It’s a position that requires a lot of athleticism and it’s a position that requires a lot of discipline. Because they’re putting you in more conflict than ever before. You need people that can respond accordingly and that’s what the modern defense is and that’s why it’s such a great challenge. That’s why everyone is watching the NFL, because these young quarterbacks are fun to watch.”

**SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.****On the pass defense:**

“We could’ve been better in some spots. [Eagles WR] DeVonta Smith got us on a couple of those over routes. He did a great job getting open. We needed those guys like [CB] Asante [Samuel Jr.] and Vato [CB Michael Davis], but I feel like [CB] Tevaughn [Campbell] stepped up, [CB] Ryan Smith stepped up, everybody did what they could.”

**On the Eagles’ fourth-quarter touchdown:**

“We saw that [Eagles QB] Jalen Hurts was running the ball. He had been a factor. Like [Head] Coach [Brandon Staley] said, he wasn’t able to get the check. When they would check, we weren’t able to get our check in. That’s how they got the explosive play on [CB] Chris [Harris Jr.]. All that stuff is very fixable. We can be better in all those spots. We’re not panicking.”

**On the significance of the win:**

“We’re a tough team. Being able to come back on the road against a tough team that just came off a big win against Detroit, I feel like it was a big win for us. We have a little momentum going into these next couple games. I feel like, as a team, we’re playing complementary football. When the defense needed the offense to step up, they stepped up. When the offense needed us to get a stop, we got a stop.”

**On defense adjusting following injuries:**

“The guys we had out there felt just as confident as the ones we were missing. I had a lot of faith in those guys. They practiced hard all week. They were communicating out there. They were confident. Nobody was panicking. The plays they did get off of us are very fixable. It really was just over routes. I was very proud of those guys for stepping in when their number was called.”

**On the ‘optimal’ allowed yards per run mark:**

“I don’t like to give up anything, but we could at least get it to 3.5 yards per carry. That will put us where we need to be. At least we can drop some yards.”

**On being 5-3:**

“We’re in a great spot. I feel like everything we want is right in front of us. We have a great team, and if we keep playing hard, I feel like we can win all our next games coming up.”

**On late-game victories:**

“On the road, in games against teams where the D-line rushes hard and a quarterback that can get the ball to playmakers, I feel like we always need to be ready. To be able to come get these wins on the road against the odds, I feel like it’s showing what type of team we have.”

**On Vikings RB, and his former Florida State teammate, Dalvin Cook:**

“We check up on each other, wishing each other to stay healthy and everything. I’m excited. That’s my guy right there. I can’t wait for Sunday.”

**On his relationship with Cook:**

“We just remind each other that we’re both dogs and to stick with it. There were a couple times I was going through adversity and he reached out to me and said, ‘Man, it’s going to happen, DJ. Just keep fighting. Just keep going.’ I thank him for that, for being that big brother that can give me that word of advice. I’m thankful to have a person like that.”

**On Cook’s improvements as a running back:**

“Dalvin’s still Dalvin. He does what he wants to do.”

**On Eagles WR DeVonta Smith:**

“He’s a great young player. He does a great job running his routes and getting open for his team. I feel like he has a bright future in this league because he works hard. He might be a smaller guy, but he plays bigger and that’s going to keep him going.”

**On the Vikings offense:**

“They’re a very balanced team. Dalvin Cook is the main advantage they have, but outside, they have playmakers. They have [Vikings WR Adam] Thielen, they have [Vikings WR Justin] Jefferson. We have to make sure that we know where they are at because [Vikings QB] Kirk Cousins can get the ball down the field to them. They lost a tough one last week, so I know they’re going to be locked in and focused this week. We have to come out and be ready.”

**On DL Linval Joseph:**

“He means a lot to our defense — not just to our defense, but to our team. I feel like he’s one of the captains on the team and he’s a vocal leader. He leads by example. I just saw him the other day getting a workout in the early morning. He’s one of the first guys in there working out already, on the elliptical getting ready. To have a guy like that, to have his mindset to just keep going at his age and years in the league, it’s incredible.”

**On his relationship with Staley:**

“It’s going well. The great thing about it is it’s both of our times; it’s his first time as a head coach and it’s my first time being a signal caller, being a captain of the team. We’re both learning new challenges, new things, every week. I feel like we’re leaning on each other and getting better and helping our team. He’s leading and I’m leading. We’re going to do whatever we can every week.”

**On Vikings RB Dalvin Cook’s ‘explosiveness’:**

“He’s a home-run hitter from anywhere on the field. He can go the distance. You need to be ready at all times. He can take an inside zone run 80 yards. We just have to be ready all of the time.”

**DEFENSIVE LINEMAN LINVAL JOSEPH****On the run defense:**

“We’re getting better. Every week, we want to try and get a little bit better. We took another step from the Patriots game to the Eagles game, now we just need to keep doing it every week and play a complete game.”

**On defensive improvements:**

“We’re starting to play together and understand what we’re supposed to do. We’re starting to find our identity as a team.”

**On stopping the run:**

“In that conference, that’s what they do. They run the ball. If you can’t stop the run, they’re just going to keep running the ball. They’re going to try and beat you to death. What we did yesterday is we stepped up and we stopped the run. We forced them to do something they didn’t want to do. Hopefully, from that game, we all know now that when we come together and stop the objective, it puts us in a better situation to win games.”

**On the run defense's goal:**

"The optimum number is to be in the top three. To be in the top three, you have to have about three yards per carry [allowed]. The goal is to give them not even one yard; stop them in their tracks so we can have them behind the yards on second and third down."

**On the Vikings' run game:**

"It's a challenge, like it is every week. They have a good running offense, just like every week. If we go out there and we stop the run and make them be one dimensional — meaning, make them have to ball — we'll be in a good situation. They have a good team. We have to go out there and do our job. We have to stop the run and get after them in all phases."

**On Vikings RB Dalvin Cook:**

"He's an all-inclusive back. He can do it all. He's a very special player and he makes a lot of plays. We have to get after him. We have to hit him before he gets started, like you have to do with [RB Austin] Ekeler, hit him before he gets started or he's going to hurt you."

**On defense's second-half adjustments yesterday:**

"We knew what we had to do; we had to man up and stop them. That's what we had to do to get the guys going. We followed the gameplan and stuck together. We didn't let the game get away. That's the best way to say it."