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Chargers Week 10 Media Availability

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HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On Lions QB Jared Goff and their relationship:

"I have a ton of respect for Jared [Goff]. I'm close with him. He has been an outstanding quarterback since he came into the league. Certainly, that run that he went on with the Rams — Super Bowl, playoffs every year, one of the top passers in the NFL over the course of four years. Now, what he's been able to do in Detroit for that team — where they started in Detroit, to now — he has been a winner. That's what happened at Cal, when he was in college, he was on a team that wasn't very good in college and then they became a really, really good football team. I have a ton of respect for him. He is playing at a really high level. He has our full respect."

On the Lions' offense and Goff's impact:

"I think that they are really balanced. I think that there is the threat of the run game on every snap. They have different types of running backs. They have really, I think, upgraded that position. [Lions RB] David [Montgomery] and [Lions RB Jahmyr] Gibbs are playing at a really high level. They play with a lot of different tight end groupings. They have receivers that really fit their style of play. You have the threat of the run, and then there is the play-action and keeper game, and they do a really good job, in the passing game, of getting the ball out on time. They really force you to defend everybody on the field. They have a lot of different guys who touch the football. Jared [Goff] has a lot of experience playing that way. That is how he played with [Rams Head Coach] Sean [McVay] with the Rams, and that is how he is playing now. He is playing really smart football and he is getting the ball to his playmakers."

On preparing for Goff and utilizing their history as a preparation mechanism for the defensive unit:

"I think that the film is what we're going to have to look at. The familiarity, I think, comes from the film because that's what we do in football is watch a lot of film [*laughter*]. He's an outstanding player. I think you can see a guy that's playing with confidence. I think that's what shows up on the film, is a lot of the things that I think I saw every day, when I was there for a year — and even before I got to the Rams, when he was playing at a really high level. The things that make him a special quarterback are the things that he's doing right now. He's really tough. He's smart. He's really accurate with the football. That was something that, when I was with the Rams, he's a really accurate player. He's a smart player, he has played in a lot of really good offensive football systems, you can see it. Now, he's just older. He has a lot of years under his belt. You can see that experience helping the offense in Detroit."

On if OLB Joey Bosa 'getting healthier' has aided the pass rush:

"I do."

On WR Joshua Palmer:

"He is dealing with a knee sprain. He will be out for the four weeks, for sure. Then, we'll just see from there."

On Palmer's 'timeline for return' and if there are 'expectations' to when he will return:

"No expectations."

On the Lions' running backs:

"Both of those guys have been dangerous for them this season. I think they really give them that one-two punch that you're kind of looking for at that position. They both are weapons in the passing game, as well. I think that's what makes them challenging to defend, is that they both can contribute in the passing game. [Jahmyr] Gibbs is a guy that has a lot of wideout characteristics, so he can split out and be utilized that way, too. They haven't played a lot together, but they can certainly play together at the same time. They both have done a really good job of running and catching the football, and in the screen game. That's what makes them challenging to defend."

On 'carry distribution' among Chargers' running backs offensively:

"Keep the status quo. [RB] Austin [Ekeler] and [RB] Josh [Kelley] are our guys. We're going to feature both of them."

On if the 'carry distribution' on Monday night 'was the plan going in':

"Just the way that we've used them the last three years, that is how we're going to continue to use them. We need to do better in the run game, but those guys are both playing just fine for us."

On Lions T Penei Sewell:

"He's one of the top tackles, I think, that is playing [in the NFL]. Much like [T] Rashawn [Slater], they have both played, I think, wiser than their years. That is a tough position to come in and play at a high level right away. I think they both have been able to do that, run and pass. That gives you an advantage, offensively, when you have premium tackles out there. They have [Lions T Taylor] Decker, who is a first-round pick, who has played a ton of football. I was in the division with him in Chicago. When you have two tackles like that, it really gives you a lot of flexibility with how you play, run game and pass game. But, I think that Penei and Rashawn have both proven, as young players, that they're two of the top tackles in the game."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.:

"I think that he's really had a quality season, from the beginning all the way to now. I think he's been consistent. I think that's what you see sometimes from someone that just needs the experience. The health, he has been healthy and been able to team up with a great player that has a lot of experience and wisdom. I think that playing together, those guys really feed off of each other, him and [LB] Eric [Kendricks]. K9 has been a difference-maker for us. He hasn't just been a solid player, I think in the blitz game, the run game man in the pass game, he has been consistent the whole way through. I'm really proud of him because he's such a great dude. I think he has the respect of everybody here with how hard he works, how hard he prepares. I just think that you've been able to see the returns on all that investment from him in how he's played. We're going to need for him to continue to play that way because when he plays well, so do we."

On Murray Jr. 'making a jump with his consistency':

"I think the scheme, just comfort zone in the scheme. Then, I think that we've played a lot better in front of him, too, now. I think that you have to factor that in, too. I think that [Linebackers Coach] Jeff Howard and [Front Seven Specialist] Mike Hiestand are doing great coaching him. You pick up another coach with Eric Kendricks. Then, I think the support around him in the run front, with the edges in the inside players, I think you factor all that in, and then K9 — all the experience that he has now, and then just his improvement as a player, all that he's put into his game — you're just seeing it all come alive."

On if the defense's performance as of late is 'what he envisioned':

"I think that it's getting closer. Probably, for us, we've been healthy and we have the right combination of people out there. That helps you, I think, play to your level. What I've seen, the last two weeks specifically, is just us playing with the right energy from the first whistle to the last one. I just think that in all three levels of the defense, we've played consistent football. We've done the things that winning defenses do, starting with the run game, and how you rush the quarterback, how you defend in the passing game, keeping the ball in front of you. Then, we've turned the football over. We've been able to get the takeaways consistently, really, throughout the season, but the last two weeks. Then, situationally, I think that we've been sharp. I think we've been on it. We're just at the beginning. This group continues to improve. Just one week at a time for this group, but we've made improvement."

On 'what has led to the takeaways' and the performance of the defense over the last two weeks:

"To me, I think our formula has been in the run game. When we get people in the known-pass, and then we get the lead. I think in both games we've had a two score lead in the first half, and that allows you to have more opportunities to rush. I think that you have to play as a team in order to get that done. I think our offense has done a really good job scoring, taking advantage of opportunities. Our special teams has scored. That has allowed us more opportunities to rush. I think any defensive coach will tell you, if you have good pass rushers, the more opportunities you can get for them to rush, the more that they're going to capitalize on those opportunities. Then, I think in the secondary, in the back seven, we've just been really sound. Our guys have played together. That's a formula that we have to keep moving forward, just making sure that we're connected in the back seven. You hear me say that word a lot, but what that does is it allows you to feast on those opportunities when they're there. Tipped balls. You get a hit on the quarterback and the ball sails. If you're connected in pass coverage, then, all of a sudden, those opportunities come alive for you in the secondary, for the interceptions and the fumble recoveries and stuff like that. It's the number one stat, winning and losing, and we put an awful lot of emphasis on it because it's a team stat. It's not just a defensive stat, our offense has done a really good job of taking care of it, as have our special teams. We're never going to lose sight of what's most important, and I think our team is doing a good job of that right now."

On S Alohi Gilman:

"He's a key for us because he's a quarterback back there. I think that he allows [S] Derwin [James Jr.] to play more free, when he's back there. He's a difference-maker more than just his production on the field, it's just how he impacts the rest of the group. He's a commander back there. He can really see the game. I think that you saw on that first third down, that pass breakup, just the disguise, and then what he gives you when he breaks on the ball. On that second possession, being able to get the football off of 17 [Jets WR Garrett Wilson]. He is a guy that has done that for us all season, when he has been healthy. We just have to keep them healthy. I'd be remiss, man, I had an adrenaline moment after the game — he got a game ball, I kind of missed it, but we got him a game ball, postgame celebration. He was worthy of it. He was lights out, in terms of getting the ball for us, the energy, consistency in performance. You guys have seen it, we've played better when he's out there. He just has to keep it going."

On using the term 'commander' to describe Gilman and where that arises from:

"For us, the way we play is the pre-snap looks and that pre-snap communication, and how he's connecting that his other 10 teammates because this is such a motion league — you guys see it, you guys report on it, it's become such as motion league — what that forces you to do is adjust. You need safeties because they have the best sightline back there to help everybody with the adjustments. A lot of times, they're anticipating the adjustment because they can see the people who are going to make the movement that's going to force you to do something. I think he's one of those guys that he just sees the game at a really high level. That's playing safety. Safety in the modern NFL, you have to be able to see. If you can't see, then you're not going to be a factor back there, or you're going to be late and that's not any good. He can really see the game pre-snap, he can see the game post-snap. With that, he can help his other teammates play really fast. When he's playing fast, he's going to get the football, too. He has that multiplier effect on everybody. He's been important for us."

On if there was a particular play in Monday night's game where that was displayed by Gilman:

"If you can go to some of the clips when there is a fast motion or a timely motion, I think you get a real sense of that commander thing that I'm talking about, because that's when you need to make the adjustments, when those motions are happening quickly. He does a great job of that for us. What that does is kind of give everybody that certainty, where everyone's cleats are in the ground and they're attacking instead of reacting. He does a great job of that for us. He's been in our system three years. Our system is built for safeties. Like you guys told me when I first got here, we've had great safety play in our system before, and it features the safeties, the way we play. Je's a good example of it for us. When he's playing at a high level, he really amplifies everybody's play."

On Lions WR Amon-Ra St. Brown and TE Sam LaPorta:

"They're really smart players. They may be young players, but they're really, really smart. [Amon-Ra] St. Brown and [Sam] LaPorta, we did a lot of work on both of those guys. They both are matchup problems because they can be anywhere in the formation. You need to be a smart player in order to line up everywhere, like they do. Sam, he's in the see-area, he's in the backfield, he's split-out wide, he's in the slot. He played in a really good system coming out of Iowa. That's why all of these Iowa tight ends play so well, because they have a lot of exposure into how the NFL is. Those guys are just real tough covers if you get the wrong guy on them whether it's a linebacker or a safety. I just think both of those guys fit the way that they want to play. They've done an excellent job and you can see it in their production."

On Lions Head Coach Dan Campbell the impact he has had on their team:

"I just think that if you take a look at Detroit when he got there to where they are now, they are two very different places. I think that's the definition of a good coach, a good leader. [Lions General Manager] Brad Holmes, their GM, and I were together with the Rams. I think that they've built a really strong football team. When I think of Dan [Campbell] and his experiences, I don't know him well, but I know where he's been and what he believes in. Then, what I'm seeing on tape, they're a line-of-scrimmage team. They're physical on both sides of the football. They play really solid football in the kicking game. They distribute the ball to a lot of different people on offense, which was characteristic of where he's been before. Then, on defense, I think that [Lions Defensive Coordinator] Aaron Glenn does a heck of a job coaching. I have a lot of respect for him as a defensive coach. He was an incredible DB in the league and has been around a lot of good defenses. They've made a lot of commitment to upgrade in the defense since they've been there. They have that side of the football playing at a high level now. You're seeing a complete football team. Obviously, they play the game the right way. They're having a great season."

On 'alternating on two-game win streaks and losing streaks' and currently being on a two-game win streak:

"We expect to stay right here. That's what the NFL demands of you. It's such a long season. There are a lot of things that can happen week to week. You have to have a team that understands the way the NFL is. You have to build the relationships in your team that can weather the storms when they come, and you need to have relationships when things are going really well. You have to be in the middle of all of it no matter what. What you have to be committed to is coming to the practice field every single day and trying to put it on tape, making sure that you just put one foot in front of the other. That's how you lead to good things on Sunday. What we did on Monday night is going to have nothing to do with how we play this Sunday. That's what you have to get your team to understand. The NFL demands your respect today, not like predicting what's going on this Sunday or what's happening in a couple of weeks from now. It's about today for us. I think our guys have done a good job. We have a lot of veteran players who have been through it that have won a lot of games. We have a lot of championship-caliber players who are young guys. You have to have that mindset that you take one day at a time. That's what is going to get you to the game and give you a chance to play at a high level."

On 'an increase in empty formation' and 'what has dictated that':

"It allows you to just see the field. It puts a lot of pressure on the defense. You have five guys out, there are only so many ways that a defense can defend that. When you have a quarterback like [QB] Justin [Herbert] that can really see the field, it allows him to see the rush, where it's coming from, identify the coverage, and then he can go get the matchup. I just think that we will always believe in that, as long as we're together. I know the amount of pressure that it puts on you, defensively. You have to have a good plan for it every single week, especially when you have a trigger man like Justin, especially when you have weapons in all position groups — running backs, wide outs, tight ends. It just puts a lot of pressure on you."

On if the team 'has a different feel' following two-straight wins:

"I think I saw our team having fun playing the game. I think that was the thing I've noticed the last two weeks, just the spirit of the way that we play has been contagious. I think that the reason why is because of the way that we've practiced. I think that our guys have gone about their business the right way during the week. I think that's gotten them to the game feeling really confident. And, as a result, I think that you see the play style and that style of play show up at the game the last two weeks. We just have to continue to build on that. What you've seen our team do is be more consistent as a result of it."

On 'examples of the team having fun':

"I think it's the way that we took the field, like in warm-ups, you could just see that it's a group that's relaxed, but it's focused, and that it's ready. We have a great group of guys. I think that you've just seen them connect a lot more during the game. That's just the way that the good teams play. You have to feed off of each other. It's an emotional game. It's a game that needs to be fun and needs to be celebrated because it's so tough out there, so tough to win in this league. When good things are happening, you have to really connect. And, when tough things are happening, you have to connect. We've just really focused on that. Like I told you guys after the Kansas City game, that reset was just keeping the main thing, the main thing and doing the things that effect winning and not worrying about anything else."

On if he 'likes where the offense is at':

"We are where we are right now. We're a work-in-progress, just like we are on defense and on special teams. I think that this group is still figuring it out together, but I like the group that we are coaching and I like the way this group's competing. Just like every other team in the league, we have to keep making adjustments. But, I like the guys that we're coaching. The thing I think that we're doing the best is taking care of the ball. As long as we do that, then we'll give ourselves a chance in every single game. We'll continue to figure out the other stuff, but we have to keep the main thing, the main thing, and we're doing the main things well, and all the other stuff, will get figured out."

On if the losses of WR Mike Williams and C Corey Linsley 'have had more of an effect':

"No more of an effect than any other team in the league. You have to figure it out. Everybody is going to go through it. You just have to be able to figure it out. That's what we're doing. Sometimes you get it figured out quick, sometimes it takes a little bit more time, but it's a season-long, I think, adjustment period for everybody, especially when you have attrition. For us, I think that our guys are doing a good job of, each week, improving, and that's what we need to do. The biggest thing that we talk about is doing what it takes to win that week. If we're doing the things that it takes to win that week, then we'll like the direction that we're headed."

On if he evaluates trends when facing teams from a difference conference or if he 'just focuses on game-to-game':

"Game-to-game. It's just so hard to be too global. If they would add more time in the day, maybe we could zoom out and take a look at what is going on over there, but God just hasn't given us more time in the day, I still see 24 hours [*laughter*]. I just think that any time you get a week like this one, you have to make it about your team. That's what I think we've really leaned into, just making it about our team. That's what we're going to focus on moving forward."

On if the defense's success over the last two games has an impact on the upcoming game:

"I think that when you have success, there's going to be more confidence, naturally. Even though we had a couple of tough moments in there, I think this group knows what it's capable of, because we're here every day. We're there in training camp, offseason. This group knows what it's made of. I just think the last couple of weeks, where we've had some good performances, it validates that, to an extent. But, we know that it is a week-to-week league, and you have to understand that. But I think it gives you that feeling, going into the next week, that we have to keep getting better, that we're not there yet but there's more out there for us. We by no means are playing to the standard that I know that we can get to, but I'll probably be saying that the last week of the season. There's always more. That's just the way we have to approach it."

On Ekeler and Kelley's 'usage':

"Those are the two running backs that we're going to play. I just think that, depending on Austin [Ekeler] and how much he's doing on first and second down, we may give him a blow on third down. Austin is our lead back and Josh [Kelley] is our number-two back. I think that they've both proven, in my three years here, that they can be really strong NFL players. I think that Austin has looked a lot more like himself after having more practice time. I think that he has played better and better, more like that we're used to seeing. I think that Josh has been consistent the whole way. That's what we need from those guys, just to be who they are. We don't need them to be anything else because they're both good players for us. It's been good to have Austin back, though, and practicing and feeling like himself because when he's playing at his level, that really changes how we play on offense."

On OLB Tuli Tuipulotu during the draft process:

"Just like he is now. Same look in his eye. Same amount of words. He's just really serious, really easy to talk to. All ball. Total focus. He has the composure of a much — he was 20 when we first met him. He just has a wisdom. It reminds me of [OLB] Khalil [Mack] a little bit. When you meet Khalil, where it's just serious. Not in an unapproachable way, it's just that you know what he's here for. He means business. He's a great kid. He works as hard as anybody we have. That's how he came off in his first impression. You just knew how much he loved the game, how much he was into the game. His family, he has great bloodlines, in terms of connections to the NFL. You can see that he was kind of brought up in the game. He has great respect for the game for a young player. I think, with young players, you're worried about them being a pro. You learn that — learning how to be a pro. Well, he's pretty advanced for his age. He's not there by any means, but he's pretty advanced for his age. He's never satisfied. That's where he reminds me of Khalil. That's what the special players do. They always know that they can do better. He's been playing well, but he believes that he can play better. I know that he can play better. That's where we need to go with him, is, 'Hey, you can do this thing at a high level. The demands that we're going to put on you are going to be high because you've proven that you can do it.' He just has the appetite for the work. I think, when you meet him, I'm with him every day, he has that appetite for the work, where there's going to be nothing too big or too small for him. You see him on our punt team. You see him rushing the quarterback, playing the run. He would do anything for the football team. He's on kickoff return. He would do anything. He's a baller that way."

On Tuipulotu 'flipping a switch' when he plays:

"The switch is always on with Tuli. That's his secret, is that the switch is never off. That's why you're seeing him play like he can. He did the same thing at college. He led the nation in sacks and tackles for loss. He played everywhere, just like he's playing for us. The respect that he has for the game is really rare. The reason why he talks about Justin [Herbert], Khalil [Mack] and all of these guys is because he has respect for the game, the greats in the game and his teammates. Making sure he's doing his part and not thinking that he's above the team. You see him get sacks and it's like, he's doing Joey's [Bosa] celebration because he's like, 'I don't want to make it about me. I'm going to share it with my teammates.' That's what you're looking for, man. You want great players that are team players. He's certainly that for us. Again, I'm not going to be going on and on about a rookie because he's got a long way to go. He missed a couple of plays in that game that he needs to make. Everyone is talking about the plays that he made, well he missed a couple that he needs to make. That's just the facts. That's why I'm so glad that he's in the room with Joey and Khalil because those are the two best coaches that he could have. They expect to make the plays. As long as he's teaming up with those guys, as a young player he's going to see what it should look like every day. What I have to live up to, you know? What I have to live up to every day in practice. To see those three guys connect, continue to improve and play together, it's going to be important for us, as a team."

On the defense featuring four players with at least four sacks:

"If you take, since I've been in the league, that 2018 Chicago team that we had — you're talking about [former Bears OLB] Leonard [Floyd] and Khalil [Mack]. You're talking about [DL] Akiem Hicks inside with [former Bears DE] Roy Robertson-Harris, [former Bears NT] Eddie Goldman. You had [former Bears LB] Roquan [Smith]. That was a deep group of players. You saw the results of how we rushed. When I was with the Rams, you got Leonard [Floyd], [Rams DT Aaron] AD [Donald], [former Rams DL Michael] Brock [Brockers], [DL Morgan] Foxy [Fox], [former Rams OLB] Samson [Ebukam], [former Rams OLB Ogbornia] Ogbo [Okoronkwo] — who's killing it with Cleveland. We had a lot of sacks. When you're a deeper team — and you see the units in the NFL that rush at a high level, they have depth. San Francisco has depth. The Jets have depth. Philly has depth. Cleveland has depth. Then, you'll see the high sack totals when you have the depth and the quality. If you just have a couple of guys that they can focus on, then it becomes more challenging. The fact that we can rotate fresh guys in there in the front has been important for us. I think [Defensive Run Game Coordinator/Defensive Line Coach] Jay [Rodgers], [Outside Linebackers Coach] Giff [Smith], [Assistant Defensive Line Coach John] Johnny Timu, [Defensive Quality Control Coach] Robert Muschamp — that group is doing a great job of developing those guys, getting them in the right rotations. That's what gives you a chance to rush in the fourth quarter and be fresh. We have to keep that up because that's what it takes to win and beat the best people that you have to beat."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On his preparation for the Lions:

"I've watched a couple of games so far, haven't had a ton of time. They have a really good front seven. They get after the passer pretty well, they force a lot of turnovers. They're really well-coached. They fly around on defense, so it'll be a good matchup."

On Lions DL Aidan Hutchinson:

"He's very talented. He's playing like a vet, I think this is his second year. He's about as talented as they come. He is able to do a great job of rushing the passer and playing defense. He's definitely one of those guys that you have to be aware of, wherever he is on the field."

On his thoughts on 'the different travel schedule' and staying in New Jersey on Monday night after the game before flying back on Tuesday:

"I thought, either way, it would have worked. I thought it was great because we were all on the same page and we communicated it and talked about it, knew what the plan was going forward. As long as we're all on the same page, I thought that was important for us."

On his 'mindset' during last week's game:

"Games like that can be frustrating. That's a really good defense. We would have loved to have moved the ball better, to score a bunch of points. It didn't go our way. But, for us, it was important to stay together, stick together, do everything that we can to convert those third downs, get the ball moving and be smart and safe with the football, and to understand that a punt on fourth down isn't a terrible thing. That's a really good defense that we were going up against. As long as we're not turning the ball over and we're doing our best to score in the red zone and to create explosives, that's all you can ask for."

On if it is 'tough to stay patient in those situations':

"No, I think it's great that we have such a great supporting cast around us, coaching us. [Offensive Coordinator] Kellen [Moore], [QB Easton] Stick and [QB] Max [Duggan], they've done a great job on the sideline, just talking with us about exactly what we're seeing, talking about the upcoming drive. To have those guys on the sideline, being able to communicate with them, I think that's really helpful."

On the performance of the defense and special teams units last week:

"I think that we have had confidence in both of those aspects of our team the entire time. It is great to see a special teams touchdown like that. To be able to get some turnovers and start with the ball inside their red zone, I think that helps the offense out a ton. There are definitely things that we could have done a lot better, to be able to drive and get the ball moving offensively, but the defense and the special teams, they helped us out a ton that game."

On 'figuring out ways to win when it's not perfect all of the time':

"I think that's part of the NFL, to understand ways to win the games. However it happens, whether it's on the ground or whether it's through the air, whether it's the defense or the offense, you're doing your best to have all three phases work together and work at their best. But, it's tough. It's the NFL. Those teams that you're playing up against are good, too. They're paying their guys a lot, too. You have to find a way to put your team in a position to win and I think that our coaches have done that."

On if he is 'satisfied and confident' with how the offense has 'protected the football':

"I think it's huge because you always talk about creating explosives, limiting turnovers and scoring in the red zone. If you're able to limit those turnovers, and the defense is causing some turnovers like that, you're going to get some huge advantages on offense. For our defense to come up with some big turnovers like that, and for us to protect the ball, be smart with it — and, at worst, punt on fourth down — I think that's good offensive strategy."

On 'if that part of the offense is sustainable':

"You can do your best to limit them. I don't think there's been a team that has avoided all turnovers. I think that's part of the game too. You're going up against some really good defenders. Things are going to happen like that. It's all about how you react. But, if you do your best to be strong with the football, have two hands on the ball in the pocket, make smart decisions and trust your guys around you, I think you can do your best to limit those."

On WR Keenan Allen:

"He's done everything. He's an incredible leader of our team. He's an incredible receiver. The way he's led, the way he's taught those younger receivers, he means the most to this team. To have a guy like that around, and for as much success as he's had in the league, he means the world to our team."

On Allen's one-handed catch to eclipse 10,000 career receiving yards:

"Not surprised. He has made those plays his entire career. I would have loved to have given him a better ball, maybe one where he's able to run with it, but the pocket got tight. I could have made a better throw. I never had a doubt that he was going to come down with it. Just being able to throw the ball up and understand that he's going to go fight for it and he's going to make a play, it makes my job a lot easier."

On his 'chemistry' with WR Quentin Johnston:

"I think it's only going to get better. The past couple of weeks, we've done our best to get him the ball. He's a talented, special player. We have to find more ways to get him the ball, whether that's in space or whether it's fly sweeps, things like that. The more reps we get together, the more time that we get, the more we're going to feel comfortable with each other and the more that he is going to get the ball. We know how talented he is, it's just a matter of time."

On RB Austin Ekeler's impact on the offense since returning from injury:

"He's about as good as it gets, too. To have a guy like that out of the backfield, who's able to catch and run, it opens up our offense. To see all the things that he's done over the course of his career, we're not surprised at all by the success that he's had, too."

On 'utilizing empty formations to spread out the offense':

"I think you're able to kind of see the defense. It gives an advantage of the offense because everything is spread out, you can see what defense they're in. And, as well, you get to utilize running backs out of the backfield. You get to put them out wide. A guy like Austin Ekeler, who is able to catch the ball really well, you get him a shot to go out and run around and do something special. I think it is a big part of our offense and we're looking forward to doing more of that."

On if that 'utilization' is 'a newer thing with Kellen [Moore]':

"I think it's always been there. I think it's just kind of one of those game plan-type things, where you where you go into a game and say, 'Hey, we might have more empty this week.' But, it's just a week to week basis."

On the decision 'to use more of it against the Jets' and if it was 'due to their pass rush':

"I think there are a few trains of thoughts on that — getting the ball out quickly, spreading out the defense, seeing what they're in, and just doing your best to kind of switch up run, pass, shotgun, play-action."

On if he has 'taken a leap in being a leader of the team' and 'being a vocal leader of the team':

"I think that every year, we're getting better at it. Every week is an opportunity to get better and to become a better leader, better teammate, better quarterback. We've done a great job of being supportive and working together on that. I feel like we have taken a big step on that."

On if he 'feels more comfortable being in front of the team and speaking up for certain things':

"Of course."

On 'what leads to that':

"Experience, time, just learning and going through it, being in the league for four years now and kind of understanding your role and responsibility as a quarterback. It hasn't been easy, but I always look forward to the challenge."

On his finger:

"It's getting better every day. We're coming up on six weeks. We're coming up on six weeks, so the bone will be healed pretty soon. Still taking care of it, doing everything I can to be safe out there. But, the trainers have done a great job of handling that, so I appreciate that."

On if he will 'still wear the splint' on his finger on Sunday:

"Yeah, I would assume. We haven't looked that far ahead, but that's something to address this week."

On if he 'ideally gets out of the splint at some point':

"Yeah, I think the bone, generally, tends to heal in six weeks or so. After that, I think you're probably pretty safe."

On if he is 'right on that six weeks':

"I would have to look at the dates, but I think we're pretty close."

On not wearing a glove 'the last couple of weeks':

"I think it was just because the glove didn't work [*laughter*]. We had to switch it up. We had to go back to the drawing board and we figured out something that worked."

On if the latest innovation is 'better structurally' on his finger:

"Yeah, for sure. Tape and the splint. There haven't been any issues with the grip. It's gotten better, strength-wise, so it's been good."

On 'being at the midseason point':

"I think we're exactly where we are. We have a lot of football left and we have a lot of guys that we believe in. We're looking forward to the challenge and the opportunity of playing football and understanding that we could have done a lot of things better, but there are a lot of good things that we did offensively this year. We're going to build on that, do everything we can to correct the errors and mistakes and keep moving forward."

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER TULI TUIPULOTU

On his first multi-sack performance:

"It felt good. I think I was going through a little slump for a couple of weeks. It was good to bounce back with a two-sack game. Hopefully, can stay consistent throughout the season."

On swapping sack celebrations with OLB Joey Bosa:

"He surprised me at the Chicago game, so I knew I had to get him back [laughter]. I had to do the little shrug for him. That's my guy, right there."

On Bosa using his sack celebration:

"It was hilarious [laughter]. I think I laughed all the way back to the bench. I was just laughing the whole time. A bunch of my people hit me up, saying, 'There ain't no way you got Joey Bosa to throw up the T' [laughter]. I think it was a good thing for me, but also a good thing for the community. A guy like Joey Bosa doing it — he has no ties to the [Tongan] culture. I guess, it's just him showing his support. I think it's pretty cool. Like I said, it was really funny [laughter]."

On playing with Bosa and OLB Khalil Mack:

"I think I've adapted very well. As the season has been going on, I think we're getting more and more comfortable with each other. I think I'm starting to understand what type of players they are on the field and what kind of things they want, stuff like that. I think we'll just keep building."

On what he's learned from Bosa and Mack:

"I think, with Joey, it's a big routine — keeping the same routine. Being consistent with that routine. With K-Mack, it's being gritty. I think just working hard no matter what the circumstances. He's the definition of hard work. Today in the weight room, he was working hard. It motivates me because he's been doing it for a long time."

On if he can learn hand usage and technique from Bosa:

"I think I could try to be like that, but I would be nowhere close to where he is. I talked to him about it, he just said it's reps. Reps, reps, reps. I don't think I'm close enough reps-wise compared to him [laughter]. Hopefully, I'll get there. I'm still trying to figure out the pass rush."

On Outside Linebackers Coach Giff Smith:

"It's a big, big deal to me with how much confidence he has in me. I know earlier in the season, he kind of told me that he doesn't treat me like a rookie. To him, I'm not a rookie. That meant a lot to me. I also don't look at myself as a rookie. Yeah, it's a cool title, but I think I'm pretty mature for where I am right now. The biggest thing is him believing in me. In Week 2, Joey [Bosa] was a little banged up and [Smith] gave me the opportunity to start. That meant a lot to me. I just had to take my opportunity and run with it."

On if he's watched Lions QB Jared Goff on film:

"We haven't watched film together yet. On my own, I've watched Jared Goff a lot because he was at the Rams for a while. I'm excited. I think it's going to be fun. It's a big challenge for us."

On facing Goff:

"I think that's the biggest thing. I think a lot of the guys were talking about it in the locker room today, but like I said, we'll dig more into it together."

On his progress this season:

"I think I'm kind of behind of what I wanted to do. I don't really have any personal goals. My biggest thing is just being consistent. I think I kind of fell off for a little bit. Luckily, I bounced back this past week. Like I said, I really just want to be consistent and contribute every week. That's my biggest thing."

On Lions T Penei Sewell:

"In 2020, I didn't have a chance to play against him because he opted out of the season — it was the COVID year. We played Oregon in the Pac-12 Championship, but I was looking for that matchup that year, too. I'm looking forward to it, for sure. He's a great player. He was an All-Pro last year. I'm looking forward to the opportunity."

On if he's asked QB Justin Herbert about Sewell:

"Ah, no. I'm still kind of scared to talk to Justin [*laughter*]. I don't know, it's just J-Herbo. I'm just weird like that. It took me a while to talk to K [Khalil Mack] and Joey [Bosa]. I'm just weird [*laughter*]."

On if he'll speak to Herbert about Southern California playing Oregon this week:

"The NFL doesn't let us bet, so we aren't going to get into that [*laughter*]."

On the Detroit offense:

"It's going to be a big opportunity for us. We had two great games, defensively. This is a great challenge for us to go out there and prove that it's not a fluke, and that we've been working. We're really looking forward to playing this offense, for sure."

On if not speaking much to Herbert is a 'respect thing':

"Oh yeah, respect for sure. It's respect."

"I was the same with Joey [Bosa] and K [Khalil Mack]. That's slowly grown. I say hi to [Herbert] in the hallway [*laughter*]."

On if he still calls Bosa 'sir':

"Oh, nah. I call him 'Joey B' or 'Joey Beeskie'. That's what I call him, 'Joey Beeskie' a lot. I don't know why."

On how he came out of his shell to Bosa and Mack:

"Oh, I think the biggest thing is that K Mack has team dinners every week. I think it's a great thing for us, defensively. I think that it builds a lot of camaraderie. Shoutout [Dolphins QB] Tua [Tagovailoa] — have you seen that little clip out of Miami? 'Camaraderie.' It builds a lot of relationships. I talked to a lot of people that I wouldn't be normally just because I'm not in their room and I'm not really good at talking to people like that. It's a great thing, building connections. I'm grateful for K-Mack for having those team dinners weekly. It's great for us, for sure."

On where he sits at the defensive dinners:

"At first, I used to be sitting in the corner and stuff. Now, I kind of sit closer to the middle where K-Mack [Khalil Mack], [DL] Nick [Williams] are. K-Mack, Nick and [DL] Morgan [Fox] are like the life of the dinner. They're always having fun, throwing jokes [*laughter*]. It's great for us, for sure."

On if he speaks to S Derwin James Jr.:

"A little bit, yeah [*laughter*]."

On if he says anything to opposing quarterbacks after a sack:

"I just scream 'Tongans' a lot. That's my culture. I scream it a lot. I think, after the sack I kept screaming, 'Tongans. Tongans. Tongans.' When I'm on the field, I'm a whole different person, for sure. I kind of just turn the switch on. Outside of it, I'm kind of like this [*laughter*]."

On adjusting from college to the pros:

"I think the biggest difference is, I'd say the speed, for sure. The closing distance between the tackle in college is kind of a little easier. The tackles don't really get as much depth as they do in the league. Of course, some tackles switch it up. Sometimes they'll jump. Sometimes they'll 45 or kick all the way back. That's the biggest thing. The reason I'm still trying to figure out pass rush is because I'm trying to learn how to get to the spot. I'm trying to close the distance without getting punched. Trying to use my timing. The timing is a lot. Talking to Joey [Bosa], timing is everything. Whether you're switching up your feet in the stance, whether you're jabbing him or not, it's the timing that's crazy. I'm still learning."

On if he's trying to learn footwork:

"Footwork, for sure. With Coach Giff [Smith], a lot of OTAs and a lot of training camp was a lot of footwork. I'm just trying to get my hands to match it."

On moving around the defensive front:

"I think I did a lot of that in college my junior year. We had a package where I was basically the linebacker and just roaming around. It's not that big of a deal. You just have to know plays. They call a play, you should know every position or what everybody is doing."

On Southern California's loss to Washington:

"My opinion, I really like [former Southern California Defensive Coordinator Alex] Grinch as a person. He's a great person. I hope everything goes well for him. I'm excited for [Southern California Co-Defensive Coordinator Shaun] Nua. That was my guy. I've said this a lot, he's a big reason why I'm here. I think he has a big opportunity to go out and show what he can do. I'm excited for him."

On the energy in the defensive meeting room:

"I think we're having a lot more fun. I think [Defensive Coordinator] Coach DA [Derrick Ansley] had a great thing of having a little celebration committee. I think it's just allowed us to have fun more. I think, when you see someone make a play, you shouldn't just look at them, like, 'Good stuff,' [*laughter*]. You should go over there and give them that confidence. Give them that little energy boost. You give him confidence, he gives you confidence. It's great for us. I think we're having fun. It's been good."

On facing a highly-ranked offense:

"We haven't had meetings since the game. For me, we have a lot to prove and a lot to do. I think it's a good opportunity for us this week."

On the length of the NFL season:

"I don't complain. Like I said, I see K-Mack [Khalil Mack] doing it. He's been doing it for years. I can't complain. I can't be like, 'My body hurts,' or, 'This is a long season.'

"I think it's fun. At the college, they have what, like two more games left? I think having the opportunity to play more games, that's just fun."

On Lions WR Amon-Ra St. Brown:

"The funny thing, I saw him at the game — USC versus Washington. That was like the first time ever I had talked to him. The year I played with him, I was a freshman and he was, like, an older dude. Like now, I didn't really talk to him [*laughter*]. My first time talking to him for real was this past Saturday. We had a good conversation. It was a pleasure to meet him. Obviously, I had met him before. It was a pleasure to talk to him. I asked him for his jersey, so hopefully I can get it after the game."

On the defense featuring four players with four or more sacks:

"It's good that we have sacks. It's helping us win games. A sack is really good for us. We just get sacks [*laughter*]."