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Chargers Week 16 Media Availability

Friday, December 24, 2021 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On Reserve/COVID-19 updates:

"We added [DL] Justin Jones and [LB] Cole Christiansen to the COVID list, but as of right now, everybody is day-to-day, except for [OLB] Joey [Bosa] and [CB] Kemon [Hall]."

On the timeline for potential activations:

"Around 1 [p.m.] tomorrow, we'll kind of know who is in and who is out, but everybody is day-to-day, except those two, for sure, will not be at the game."

On if S Derwin James Jr., will play on Sunday:

"Derwin is going to be available to play. He was out there today. He's progressing well. We'll just treat it more like a game-time decision. Similar to the Chiefs game, he'll work out before the game. We'll make sure that he is good enough to play, but I think that he will be available for us to play in this game."

On 'making sure' that James' health is a priority:

"That's been our full consideration since it happened. Like I said, he'll be available to play; whether or not he plays will be decided between now and then. But, we do want him to be available because he is better this week. We will never put him out there at the expense of losing him long-term."

On 'if he has heard anything from the League about a possible postponement of the game':

"We have not. We expect the game to be played."

On CB Asante Samuel Jr.'s health status:

"Asante has been cleared and he will play in the game. He will start in the game."

On Samuel's impact on the defense:

"He's one of our top players. He allows us to play the way we want to play. We're certainly better when he's out there. He's a guy that can really make an impact on not only just covering, but he can get you the football, too. He's an outstanding tackler. He improves us in all areas. It's been great to have him out at practice the last couple of weeks because you can see the confidence that he's playing with. Now, he gets to go showed in a game. I just commend all of our training staff, our whole organization, for making sure that he got back safe and sound. He has that full confidence that it requires in the NFL. I've been proud of him about how he's responded from this."

On the week of practice:

"We had an incredible week of practice. We're really proud of everybody in the organization. I think we've had maybe our best week of practice since the beginning of the season. The level of focus, I think that's what you're after, as a head coach, when there are some circumstances, some obstacles, to use them as an opportunity. Whether it's COVID, Christmas, etc., we've been able to really navigate it full speed and make a lot of improvements this week. I've been very impressed with our group this week. Now, we're excited to go play."

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.'s adjustment to also playing EDGE:

"Kenny continues to improve. He's going to start in the game for us. I'm really excited to see him compete. He's had a tremendous attitude. He's improving. He's getting more comfortable there. We're going to continue to accelerate that role. [Linebackers Coach] Mike Wilhoite and [Run Game Coordinator/Outside Linebackers Coach] Jay Rodgers have been doing a tag-team job coaching the guy. I've been really proud of him. Hoping that he's able to play how he's practiced because he's practiced very well."

On the depth at EDGE:

"We definitely have enough with E [OLB Emeke Egbule], [OLB] Uchenna [Nwosu] and K9 [Murray]. We'll borrow from the D-line with [DL] Jerry [Tillery] and [DL] Andrew Brown, those guys can play on the edge for us, too. It's going to be that type of game. We're going to have to borrow from other groups to get it done. I know that we have enough guys to go play quality football. It's going to be outstanding opportunities for everybody."

On visits to the quarterback room in-season:

"I'm in there all week. I think it's one of the things I've enjoyed the most about being a head coach, being able to be in a lot of different places, but especially in the quarterback room. I'm fortunate, as my first head coaching position, to be able to be in a quarterback room with [QBs] Justin [Herbert], Chase [Daniel] and Easton [Stick], three outstanding people, players. To be in the quarterback room was [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane [Day], [Offensive Quality Control Coach] Chandler [Whitmer] and [Offensive Coordinator] Joe [Lombardi], it's made me, certainly, a better head coach. I've, hopefully, been able to help their game out, too. It's just brought us more together and allowed us to be more connected week-to-week. I think that you've been able to see the progress that our offense has made throughout the season. I think that a big reason why is because of the connection between us coaches and the players. I've really enjoyed that role."

On the team's Pro Bowl selections:

"Any time that you get that many guys on the Pro Bowl roster, it's a reflection of the season that you're having. I think that the fact that we have five starters in the game, also, I think reflects the type of season that we're having. I think all six of those guys were deserving. I'm really proud of the alternates that we had, too. I think that any time you have team success, individual awards are going to follow. I know how hard those guys have worked at their game, the six guys who made it, and then the four alternates. Just so proud of them, they deserve it. They're very, very, very deserving. Hopefully, it says a lot about where our team can go this year. I think that that is also the takeaway for me, that when you have a group this quality, now you have to maximize it. We have three more games in the regular season to try and maximize this group and that's where our focus is."

On preparing for the final three games of the regular season:

"I think this team has another gear that we can get to. I know that it can in all three phases. I'm very confident in that and I'm very confident that we will reach that. I think that our players feel the same way I do. Our first opportunity to prove it is this Sunday. It's going to be a great challenge for us and we're looking forward to it."

SPECIAL TEAMS COORDINATOR DERIUS SWINTON II

On WR Andre Roberts' kickoff return:

"All of it. I think it was a culmination of all the work that we've done. We've been adding up the last few weeks. You just saw it. He broke a few tackles, but guys were in the spots that they're supposed to be and connected to the people they're supposed to be connected to. Then, sometimes, it's just a guy being a good player, at the end. I told him, 'It happens like that sometimes.' You're wide open and you're like, 'Oh gosh, I need to cut back.' You want to score, but he did a really good job on that long return setting us up with good field position. Then, just, as far as the game went I think having the ability to have a good kickoff unit, they want to kick touchbacks the rest of the game. [QB] Justin [Herbert] knows he's going to start at the 25 [-yard line]. That's an advantage for us. Putting that, I guess I don't want to call it fear, but putting that decision-making out of the way where they're like, 'Hey, we don't want this to happen again because they're a really good fourth-down unit.' Being able to start the momentum off and being able to consecutive weeks in a row, I think, is really good and is our unit just coming together. I think you've seen the growth. That just was a culmination of it. I hope it keeps building and keeps building."

On coaching the specialists with the aggressiveness of the offense on fourth down:

"I think it's like anything. Like any position. You're ready. He knows that he's ready at all times. He knows what the philosophy is of the team and he's ready to go. It doesn't mess with [K] Dustin [Hopkins]. He's a high-level kicker. He's done a good job over the course of the years. He's just ready to kick at any point. I don't think he looks at it like, 'Oh, it's a slight to me.' I think he looks at it like, 'Hey, we have Justin Herbert. We have a high-powered offense. I'm ready to go if they need me.' He knows coming in what we've done, our philosophy. He's ready to go. All of the specialists know. Even when we don't punt it. They're ready to roll at any point. It's no slight to them. It's just saying this is what we do philosophically, as a team. We're ready to roll at any point. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley makes the decision to go for it or kick it, we're ready to roll. I think those guys, mentally, are strong enough that they don't worry about that type of stuff. They'd tell you, I'm here to do my job whenever I'm called upon. It could be a second down. Whenever they're called upon, I think they're ready to roll. It's not one of those things. They're not weak-minded guys who go, 'He doesn't believe in me.' They know he believes in them and they're ready to respond at any point."

On the analytics of going for it on fourth down versus kicking it:

"It's a people game, right? It's not a numbers game. He has decisions to make and we ride with them. He's our head coach. Everybody can sit there behind their desk, behind their TV and monitor and say, 'Hey, you should, you shouldn't.' But, when the trigger is on your back, you better make those decisions. It's hard to pull the trigger. We stand behind him. You see that the whole team is like that. We had that type of mentality. When you know, you're not like second-guessing. We're not a second-guessing team. I laugh at it because people are like, 'I should go play the lotto if it's \$500 million,' but do I go waste my money every week? No. We should do a lot of things, but he has to make those decisions. We ride with him. That's what we're going to do. That's a testament to what he's built in the culture here. All of our guys believe it. I've been on teams where guys might get divisive. We know what we're doing and that's what we're going to do. If you look at it with our games, and he's said it, there are games where you could say, 'Well, why did you do that?' And we won the game. You can go hindsight is 20/20. I think it's one of those things where we're all ready for whatever the situation is. That's what we're trained in practice to do. We're ready to roll."

On LB Amen Ogbongbemiga's celebration after drawing a penalty:

"I tell those guys, 'Listen, whatever you do, as long as it's energetic, I'm not judging it,' but I did like to see him having fun. I think you see it with our whole unit. Now, they're gathering their own personality. It's starting to show a little bit. As I tell them every Monday, you can't have personality if you don't make plays. If you don't make plays, there's no dancing involved. If you force a penalty, it helps the defense. We start inside the 10-yard line. It's a really big momentum shift. I tell them, 'You can dance. You can have fun,' within the rules. Not in front of an opponent, not getting a taunting penalty, but we want to have fun. We're here. We're working. It's a child's game. You're getting paid a king's ransom, so you might as well fun while you're doing it. It's good to see their personality show out. They know the dances better than I do."

On Ogbongbemiga dancing after drawing a penalty:

"I mean, [OLB] Joey [Bosa] might do it sometimes, too. If he gets a holding or something like that, he might — I don't know if you can call what Joey does, dancing, but I think it's the same celebration-deal. I think that's what you see it oozing over from one side of the ball to the other. Everybody is getting their personality [involved]. That's a good thing. That's how you know you're building a strong culture where guys are letting their personality show while staying within the realm of the scheme and what we're doing. It's really fun to see. It was a really fun game. The result didn't go the way that we want, but I think, for us, as a young team to mature and see those games, and that happening that way — we did our part. Just trying to chug along and make this playoff run, I think it's really good for us."

On preparing for a game with players going onto Reserve/COVID-19:

"I said it earlier this week to the guys — usually we go into the week and we have a personnel sheet and say, 'This guy is going to be here. This guy is going to be here.' I walked in the last three days and go, 'Alright, tear 'em up. It's preseason football. You don't know who's going to show up.' It's going to come down to technique, it's going to come down to your scheme just as far as executing what we have to do. This thing is what it is. You just have to adapt to it. Whoever shows up, just trust our technique, what we do well, manage the things that we can manage — because they have to manage it as well. You can't go into it like most weeks like, 'Hey this number, 57, is going to be here.' You don't know. You just don't know. Up until game time, you don't know. Then, it's about in-game adjustments. It's about in-game adjustments. The personnel that we have, putting them in the best situation that we have possible for them because there are going to be guys that just haven't had the reps. You just try to put them in situations where you say, 'Hey, you're going to be here. This is what you do well, so do that.' That's the adjustment for me dealing with the entire roster in different spots — field goal and field goal block. All of those things with this COVID deal that we just have to navigate. I think it's really taught all of us in the world that you have to be adaptable. You just have to be adaptable. You can't be like, hey I'm going to do this. You have to adapt. Things are changing. That's been good for us because the players just respond to it and keep going. Somebody goes out? Okay. Who's up next? You got it? Yep. Coach, you want me here? Good. It's been really good in the mindset-wise. We love to have those guys, but I think our guys are ready to respond — the guys that will be playing."

On CB Kemon Hall's field goal block attempt by rushing off of the edge:

"He's just making sure that the ball is kicked; he's a scoop-and-score player. He has the edge. Just in case this thing gets blocked, he's going to scoop-and-score it. If we block it inside, there has to be somebody there if it goes backwards that can scoop it and run it for a touchdown. There will be times where he rushes. It's just part of the scheme. Every rep is different. You'll see the two edge players sometimes scoop-and-score it when it's blocked, sometimes they will rush the edge. We have different schemes with that. That's what he was doing. We have a thing where we don't look back. I tell them that they don't need to look back to see if the kick is made, there will be a big video board in every NFL stadium; they're on both ends. I've been in situations and seen situations where a guy gets caught looking back after the ball has been blocked and he's not there, then they recover it and you don't have the ability to scoop-and-score. He's really disciplined, making sure that the ball is kicked, in case there is a fake, as well. That's what he does on field goal block."

On 'if he has fake punts and fake field goals available' and determining when to call them:

"Always. Every week, we have things up. That's just how we operate. We have standard things that we have up every week on every phase, whether it be a fake, reverse, things like that. It's just a matter of how the game goes. [Head] Coach [Brandon Staley] talks about playing the game that is there that week. It's just a matter of how things go, of what looks they're giving us. Some weeks, it's very detailed. Some weeks, it's like, 'If we're in this situation in the game, we're just going to run it.' When those situations present themselves, we do have them up and available. As you look at the flow of certain games, do you need it or do you not need it? It's just communication between Brandon and myself if we want it up or if we don't want it up. It's a feel thing. If you look at a fake punt, go back to the Giants game; they weren't really rolling so they went for a fake punt. We went down and scored more points. You have to know, situationally, how you want to do it, from a team aspect. How are they playing on offense? How are they playing on defense? We have those things up. It's just a matter of when they'll be available every week. They're there. We'll see when the moment presents itself, but we have them in the back pocket, just in case."

QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On being named the AFC starter for the 2022 Pro Bowl:

"I think that it's a huge honor. I have to thank all of my teammates and my coaches who have helped along the way — [Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Shane Day and [Offensive Coordinator] Joe Lombardi. All of the time that we spent this offseason, especially with the offensive line that we've had, they've done an incredible job all year. I couldn't have done it without them."

On if he 'considered the AFC Pro Bowl starter in year two' when preparing for the 2020 NFL Draft:

"It really wasn't [in my mind]. My priorities at that time were, wherever I go to understand the offense. To learn that and to get there and get timing with the receivers. Whatever happens, happens after that. All that I can control is my effort and my attitude. Good things will happen if you put in the work. It's kind of funny how things have worked out over the past couple of years, but I wouldn't change a thing."

On how he found out he had been named the AFC Pro Bowl starter:

"I think [S] Derwin James [Jr.] might have told me, actually. He knew before anyone else. He came up to me in the locker room and told me. I said, 'Is it official?' We kind of joked about it. It was good to hear it from him."

On Passing Game Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach Shane Day:

"He's meant so much. He's so smart. Anything that I've been able to pick up around him has been so useful. We meet before practice, after practice. During meetings and after meetings, he's always around. He loves football. He loves us quarterbacks. I have so much respect for him. He's helped me become a better quarterback, a better teammate, a better friend — whatever it is. He's a great coach. It's one of those things that I've really appreciated is getting to know him."

On the custom Nike shoes he was sent for reaching 600 career completions:

"I was not [involved in the design], actually. They told me that they were going to make them. I'm a huge shoe fan, huge Nike shoe fan. They made them and they were even cooler than I would have thought they were. I have them. I don't think those are shoes that I ever wear, but they are impressive. I really appreciate what they did for me."

On the teammates initials on the heels of the shoes:

"I thought it was awesome. I thought they did a great job because that is exactly what I would have wanted. To have all the guys from last year and all of the guys from this year, I think it's a cool nod to have those guys on there. I'm not there without them. To have them on there, I thought that meant a lot."

On the offensive system's evolution:

"I think we're always learning, always trying to develop and get better. It is tough. It's year one [in the system] and there are going to be mistakes. There are going to be growing pains. I think the great thing about our team, about our coaching staff is that we're all working together and that we're all selfless. Everyone is trying to get better. As long as we're doing that, good things will happen. It might not go our way all the time, but to have those guys battle every week, there's no place I'd rather be."

On T Rashawn Slater being named an AFC starter for the 2022 Pro Bowl as a rookie:

"It's not surprising. He's about as good as they get. He works harder than anyone. As soon as he showed up here, we knew how special he was going to be. Throughout fall camp, throughout the season, he's done it time-and-time again. He's a guy that you trust, the guy that you want to play behind. He's a great friend in that locker room."

On if he knew the last Chargers quarterback to start in a Pro Bowl was Hall of Fame QB Dan Fouts:

"I did not, but I was always a big Dan Fouts fan."

On if he talks to Fouts often:

"We'll text from time-to-time. He's always been around at Oregon spring games, so I got to meet him. He was friends with my grandfather. He's just a great guy that I've gotten to learn a bunch from. It's really cool that it worked out here."

On C Corey Linsley:

“Corey has been a really smart guy that has taken charge of that offensive line. He’s a great communicator. The offensive line a great group of guys. As soon as we get the play-call in and break the huddle, he’s up to the line making the MIKE I.D. He’s been so smart over the past couple of years. He’s had so much success that he’s helped our offense a ton.”