

## LOS ANGELES CHARGERS vs. TENNESSEE TITANS POSTGAME TRANSCRIPTS

Sunday, December 18, 2022 ⚡ SoFi Stadium ⚡ Inglewood, Calif.

### LOS ANGELES CHARGERS HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

#### **On today's win:**

"Just proud of the team. I felt like all three phases hung tough today. That's been the story of our season, hanging tough together. We definitely needed all three phases to win today. It was a tough rugged game. That team was playing for their playoff lives, for their division. You can see that they play with a lot of purpose. I felt like our guys had their best when their best was required there at the end. But, it was a tough, tough football game. I'm proud of our football team, that we finished it."

#### **On the defense's performance over the last two games without S Derwin James Jr.:**

"We have a really good defensive culture right now. We have a lot of guys that believe in each other. What we've had to do is have people step up and play significant roles, and it has brought out the best in them. I really feel like we're playing as a unit. That's what I feel out there, I feel like a team that's playing as a unit. I'm disappointed that we weren't able to finish that out in two-minute, but our guys fought to the end there on the goal line and gave us a chance. Very proud of our defensive football team. We were excellent on third down today. Put a roof on the coverage. I thought we rushed the passer well, put a lot of pressure on the quarterback today. We made it tough on him in the run game. Our guys really competed today. I thought that that was the story of the game, was how our defense played."

#### **On the defense 'coming alive' in the second half:**

"I really like the way that we played against the run. I thought we had more opportunities. I thought that we did a good job of mixing up the [personnel] groupings. I felt like we got a lot of quality inside and outside pressure. It wasn't just perimeter pressure, we had good pressure up the middle. We had good rushes from linebackers. With as much attention that's being put on [OLB] Khalil Mack, I think that we've had other people step up. You saw [OLB] Chris Rumph, [OLB] Kyle Van Noy, [DL] Joe Gaziano and our linebackers were rushing. I thought that [CB Bryce] Callahan had a couple of quality rushes. But, the only way that you get to rush in this league is by defending the run. This is, I think, our third straight performance on third down of 30 percent or better for us, and that's good sign, defensively."

#### **On QB Justin Herbert's performance today:**

"I thought he had his best one his best was required. You saw all the things that make him special there; his resilience, his poise, his play-making. There was a lot of pressure inside today. Their inside players are outstanding. [Titans DT] Jeffrey Simmons is one of the top players in the league. He's as good of an inside player that I've seen since I've been in the league. There was a lot of pressure inside and it was tight, but Justin [Herbert] played like he always does. He's patient. He was able to make big plays for us. He was able to find [WR] Keenan [Allen] and [WR] Mike [Williams] today, and [WR] Josh [Palmer] a couple of times. You find out about your quarterback in two-minute, and it was an amazing two-minute drill for him."

**On Williams' catch to set up the game-winning field goal:**

"We practice it all of the time, but he is a veteran player, too, and an experienced player. Mike [Williams] has been in a lot of these drills. I thought what was really cool was that I had a really good vantage point when Justin [Herbert] rolled right — just the chemistry those guys have like — as he was rolling right, you could just see that he was going to put it back shoulder, back in bounds, where the defender couldn't make a play on it. Those guys just have that magic that you need to have.. They're a premium tandem. Justin has that same magic with Keenan [Allen], where they can just find each other. We obviously needed all of it and I really felt like we managed the end of the game at a high level, outside of the delay [of game], but I really felt like we gave our ourselves a chance to win that game."

**On two-straight AFC wins and currently ranking sixth in the AFC standings:**

"It's been tight since the bye [week]. Every game that we have played is against the team that's in the hunt. I think that we've played quality football since the bye. We've been in a lot of these tight games. We're used to being in these games. I think that you see the poise and the confidence in our team come alive, even when it's tight. That's a good football team. They've been in the playoffs three straight years, probably going to go four. They have a lot of players that have been in big games. To beat them after they've lost three games, they were playing with a lot of purpose. You saw what Miami did the other night. For us to have two quality wins in a row at home, I'm very proud of our team."

**On the defensive gameplans over the last two weeks:**

"I think that we have the guys in the right roles. There's been some continuity. I know that there's still people out, but we got the right guys doing the right jobs and we're playing team defense. Since I've been here, you've heard me say it. Team defense last week against Miami is much different than team defense this week, but we're playing team defense. You're seeing all 11 players connected to the gameplan, executing their assignment, their technique and their effort. They're playing with the right energy. I felt like we've played as hard as we've ever played, since I've been here, on defense. You can feel the energy, where you get the playmaking, and we needed all of it today because our defense won us the game today. They gave us a chance. I am really proud of the way that group has been coming together. As we get guys back, we're going to continue to play better and better. I like the way we're playing right now."

**On the run defense's performance tonight:**

"Knock-back. Edges. Second-level. Swarm. That's what it was today. We tackled well. We didn't have any of these catastrophic misses, where you see this guy — and it's all over his movie, he's been in the NFL in a long time, and it was all over his movie in college at Alabama. We tackles well today and we were coming to hit him today. So often, you feel the yards after contact because you're kind of absorbing him, and I didn't feel that today. I felt like our guys were aggressive."

**On if he 'ever finds himself amazed' with Herbert:**

"Not much. Rarely. I'm more amazed at practice than I am at the game, to be honest with you, because there's some things that you guys don't even get to see on the practice field that blows me away. The poise that he has is his biggest trait, to me, is his poise. You have to have that in your quarterback. Today was a tough day, kind of, for our offense. It was kind of an uneven day, but he's not that way. He's not uneven. He's steady. Then, when you have to have it with 40-plus seconds left on the clock and no timeouts, you know that he is going to perform, and that's what he does."

**On 'if championship teams have to have a guy like that':**

"Oh yeah. You definitely have to, definitely, because your trigger-man is the answer for your whole team. The other thing, if you take a look at the ballgame from the sideline, just how into it he was with the defense, knowing that the defense is playing their tail off, our special teams is playing his tail off, and he barked at our guys and said, 'I got it. I got it, fellas. You just give us a chance, and we got it.' That's what you want from your trigger-man, and that's why I'm proud of him. He's not going to be happy with how we play today, and neither am I, and that's the other reason why we love him, because he's not satisfied with how we play. He has a high standard for performance. You need your best player to play well at the end, and that's what he does."

**On if that trait ‘is something that Herbert has developed over time’:**

“I think that he has always had it. As you get more of a comfort zone and more familiar with your teammates and coaches, I think you get to be more of yourself. I think he’s earning it. When you come into the league, you’re brand new, you’re just trying to earn it, trying to earn everything. That’s what is also great about him is he tries to earn everybody’s respect. He would much rather do that. That’s why guys love him. Again, we’re going to need him to play well down the stretch for us.”

**On RB Austin Ekeler’s touchdown run:**

“I thought that was one of the bright spots for us today in the red zones. We were two-of-two in the red zone. I felt like we’d run the football in both times, which is what we were kind of searching to do. I felt the physicality down there, certainly his second effort and his nose for the end zone. I felt like that was a bright spot for us today on offense.”

**On the usage of DB Ja’Sir Taylor on particular base personnel packages:**

“Just wanted a bigger guy to match up with the back.”

**On ‘taking care of your business’ in regards to the playoff race:**

“I think the last part of what you said is the most important part, which is us controlling the Chargers and taking care of our football team. We still have a lot of improvement to make. We got some guys back today on offense, but it’s fully integrating them into the plan and getting into rhythm. You can see that our receivers, I think, are finding that normal stuff with Justin [Herbert], like how we’re used to playing when everyone’s together. But, we have to get everybody integrated. On defense, we get D.J. back, and, hopefully, get [OLB] Joey [Bosa] back. You want to make sure that you’re getting improvements, making the improvements, so that you can play your best at the end. It’s been a fight this season, as you guys all know, to get in to a spot where you can say that, but that’s what we’re going to have to do down the stretch to win this game versus Indianapolis. We have to make the improvements, use the extra day to our advantage, have a great week of practice and then go play a team that’s a very proud football team, that has a lot of good players on it.”

**On the team’s current playoff situation ‘after everything the team has been through this season’:**

“I think what today’s performance was a good example of is that we’re a connected team. You guys have heard me say that and I believe that. You have to be a connected team because you’re going to go through so much. It can’t just be your offense lighting it up and you’d kind of just watching them play, or maybe it’s your defense lighting it up, and you’re just kind of watching them do their thing. You have to have a team in all three phases that’s playing together. You have to have coaches, players, organization that believes in each other, the way you practice, the way you compete every single day. I think that, because we’re connected, it has allowed us to endure all that has happened this season, because that is the only explanation. There’s no other way to explain it. Otherwise, we would be 3-9 or worse. We believe in one another, and it’s because of what we do every day together.”

**On Herbert’s reaction following his second interception:**

“I mean, he wasn’t happy [*laughter*]. We knew that he would get them in the end. I don’t need to send Justin [Herbert]. Justin knows exactly what happened out there. That’s why we love them, because no one is going to be tougher on him than himself. He knew that he was going to make up for it. He had that look in his eye at the end, like, ‘Hey, I’m going to go do something to help us win,’ and that’s what he did. We have to make the improvements, like I said, looking at this tape, because it wasn’t a clean game offensively for us, but we can make the improvements. Like I said, our offense had its best at the end when we needed it.”

**On the final offensive play of the first half that ended in an interception:**

“It’s supposed to be where it was, out of bounds. He was trying to take time off the clock so that we can kick it. Their guy just made an incredible play. Mike [Williams] didn’t really get outside there. It was just one of those incredible plays by them that people are going to be showing for years to come about what to do when you’re in that spot. We were just trying to get it out of bounds, and then take some time off [of the clock] so that we could finish the half with a field goal, kind of like we did there at the end of the game — throw it outside, get some time off, let’s kick it, then let’s roll.”

**On the crowd today:**

"I definitely felt the Powder Blues, saw the Powder Blues. I've been seeing it all year, on the road in Atlanta, Arizona. Then, in our home games, we've been in primetime a bunch, where a lot of people travel to LA and big cities, and I've felt the Powder Blues the whole season. This was a big game for our team. You could really feel it on defense. When we were on defense, you could hear it, the energy that it provides your team. Then, obviously, the big plays on offense, you're going to get all that noise. Then, when your kicker hits it at the end, that eruption. The Powder Blues are coming."

**On the offense's performance today:**

"Inside, we didn't handle their front very well. They have a good front. Simmons is as good of an inside player that I've played against in the league. He is fantastic. They're really good inside. I didn't think that we did a good job inside. Just kind of out of sync a little bit. We had a lot of good plays in there, and then, there were some plays that just is not up to our standard. We need to improve."

## **LOS ANGELES CHARGERS QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**

### **On the offense's performance today:**

"It wasn't easy for us today out there. Unfortunately, we didn't put up enough points to really give our defense a shot. I have so much respect for our defense for coming up with big stops all game long and they played their tails off. They did an incredible job. We have to be better as an offense."

### **On communicating with the defense throughout the game:**

"I think that is just something that we kind of always do after every drive. They have done such a great job battling all day and we didn't put up as many points as we would have liked to, and so going over to them and just telling them, 'Hey, keep doing a great job. You guys are fighting. We'll get it figured out as an offense.' It was good for us to be able to drive down there at the end."

### **On if the game-winning drive 'was a manifestation of him being more comfortable in those types of situations':**

"I would have loved to have the game go a different way and not to have to be in that situation. Like you mentioned, that is one of those things that we have been through and we have practiced that. We have practiced two-minute drives all of the time in practice and all throughout camp. We know that we have special receivers, a great offensive line blocking and [WR] Mike Williams goes and make the plays. To be able to go through that and deal with as much adversity as we did today and not be able to score points and turnovers and things like that, for those guys to hang tough, believe in the defense and believe in each other, it was really good to see for us."

### **On sitting at sixth in the AFC playoff seeding following today's win:**

"I think it's a great opportunity for us to keep playing football. There is a lot of football left. We're in a position where if we just attack week by week, we'll see what happens. Guys are excited to get back after it. They are going to get their bodies back. We'll watch the film tomorrow and we'll address what went wrong today. Just to hang tough and be able to win a game like that, especially in December, it's good to see from us."

### **On WR Mike Williams and his performance today:**

"He is just a special athlete and he wants nothing but the best for this team. To have a guy like that, a competitor, an athlete, a teammate like that in the locker room, we're better off because of him. When we get drives like that and we don't have any timeouts and we have to make a play, Mike [Williams], [WR] Keenan [Allen], those guys are there to make them happen."

### **On if he 'feels any pressure' in two-minute drills:**

"I think it's just one of those things that experience is the best teacher and having gone through that and being able to rep it and knowing that you have the guys around you to make plays. [C] Corey Linsley is leading that offensive line and they are going to give me enough time to get the ball off. If all else fails, find [RB] Austin Ekeler and getting out of bounds. Just experiences and knowing that we are going to call the right plays and we're going to get the ball moving."

### **On 'how he was able to put his early game struggles behind him':**

"That's the tough part about the NFL. We would have loved to have it gone another way. We would have loved to put up a bunch more points. We didn't play well as an offense and it starts with me. Can't turn over the ball like that. I have so much respect for the defense for coming up with stops like that. It starts tomorrow. Watching the film and getting better and picking up where we left off because as an offense, we can do a lot better."

### **On if he was 'thinking about overtime' when the Titans tied the game in the fourth quarter:**

"I think with as much time as we had, the plan was just to be able to go down and score and get to the 35-yard line for [K] Cameron [Dicker]. The special teams did a great job all day long and the defense did a great job, too. It was good to see for those guys."

### **On if having Dicker 'makes it easier' in late-game situations:**

"For sure. He has done such an incredible job and even in practice. We have so much confidence in him. The way he stepped in, has made his kicks and the way he has gone about it is a true professional. We trust him and it was really good to see from him today."

**On ball placement to WR Mike Williams in the last drive of the game:**

"I think the biggest thing is Mike [Williams] was aware of the situation. He kind of pointed up like he wanted a jump ball. And so, I was able to lock eyes with him and the defender, his eyes were on Mike and not on me. If you are able to put it anywhere around him, Mike has the advantage of being able to kind of move and pick it up and the defender is not being able to see it. Having a big target like Mike, knowing that he is going to the sideline, and you can really put it anywhere around the defender, he's going to go up and get it. To have a guy like Mike making those catches, he has done a fantastic job all year."

**On WR Keenan Allen's 31-yard reception and RB Austin Ekeler's two rushes that set up his rushing touchdown and what it meant to the offense:**

"We just have to stay patient. It didn't go our way early on in the game and I turned the ball over a couple of times and we would love to have those back, but you have to stay at it. You have to keep pushing the ball down field and trusting the guys around you and know that Keenan [Allen] is going to make a play happen, Austin with an incredible 12-yard run there. You just have to stay together. There was no flinching, no doubt by our team, especially as an offense. It went our way after that."

**On the remaining three opponents not being teams who currently hold a spot in the playoffs:**

"I think it is truly week-by-week. Whoever we are playing this week, I think it is the Colts, they are going to require all of our attention because they are a really good football team, as well. We have to have a great protection plan, great preparation all week to have any chance on Monday because they are a really good football team."

**On if 'staying at it encapsulates quarterback play':**

"I think it does. I think when you deal with adversity, you never want to get too high and you never want to get too low. Things seemed like they were pretty low at times. We are turning the ball over and we're not moving the ball as much as we want on offense, but there was no flinch. There was no doubt by our team, like I mentioned, and those guys knew that if we were going to get another opportunity to be able to drive the ball down the field, that we would be able to convert. To have that offensive line, the receivers, the tight ends, did a great job battling all day."

**On WR Mike Williams describing the locker room after the game as 'turnt':**

"He does a great job with descriptions, so I would have to agree with him [*laughter*]."

**On if there will be a 'Christmas Victory Brisket':**

"I guess that's about that time of the year [*laughter*]. That's something that we can look forward to, I guess."

## **TENNESSEE TITANS HEAD COACH MIKE VRABEL**

### **On what clicked on the final offensive drive and why there wasn't more consistency on offense throughout the game:**

"I think just mistakes and, obviously, the same stuff — penalties. Critical penalties. I mean, it's the same in all three phases. There's some good stuff and, obviously, some stuff that we have to correct. I don't think anybody can function and certainly us right now, in those long-yardage situations, offensively."

### **On losing a tough game late:**

"Losing late, losing early — I appreciate the way they compete. We did a nice job in the first half in that situation, but we weren't able to keep them inbounds for them to use some clock. That's so critical right there."

### **On what he said to the team after the loss:**

"Nothing I can tell them that's going to make them not be disappointed, upset. We spilled our guts out there, but it's about the same message. It's about figuring out ways to help the guy next to you. Coach them better, understand the details, making sure everybody's prepared to go with that mindset — that they can come in there and play. You see guys that go out there for us, or somebody gets hurt and next guy needs to go in. So, those are situations that we have to be ready to go. There's nothing you really can say to them, other than, 'Get some rest, and we need to spill our guts again and find a way to win on Saturday.'"

### **On electing to throw on two separate third-and-two plays:**

"Because that's what we chose to do."

### **On the decision to call pass plays on third-and-two:**

"Because that's the play that we called."

### **On if still leading the AFC South is the point of emphasis, rather than negative feelings from the loss:**

"Well, the point of emphasis is just we have to put into another week, eliminate some of the mistakes, execute better. When we play complementary, our offense answered back, defense did a nice job at sudden change things that showed up last week. [Titans CB] Roger's [McCreary] play at the end of half — Roger had an interception at the end of the half last week that turned into a touchdown, that turned into a double-up situation. The game got away from us this week. Roger made a fantastic play. We took some momentum in there into halftime, but then mistakes. We hung around and just came up short."

### **On if he was surprised at Titans QB Ryan Tannehill's availability after being carted off:**

"I've told you about Ryan's toughness and what I think about that. He can't get hit as many times as he does, or how he gets hit. We've talked about that. Nothing good happens in this league, especially when your quarterback gets hit. But I'm never going to question his toughness or his willingness to go in there to try and help the team."

### **On T Dennis Daley being replaced by OL Dillon Radunz, then coming back in the game:**

"We talked — it was a rotation. That he was going to play through the first quarter, then Dillon was going to go in there and then we were going to make a decision. That was something that we had come up with during the week. It was planned out. I didn't want Dennis or Dylan to think that if they made a mistake, they were going to get pulled. It was, play the first quarter, play the second quarter, and then we'll decide from there."

### **On the offensive line:**

"We all make it tough. We have to get them the information and we have to get them the game plan, stay out of some of those situations. Then when we chip, we have to chip better and we have to protect better. There were times where the quarterback had time and nobody was open. There were times when the quarterback did not have time and guys were open. That is how this thing goes and you'll continue to try to pinpoint it on one person. It's not that, it is a cumulative operation and when it is done well, I think we can win good football games."

"The best offensive lines are ones that work great together, that do that. We've done that this year. We did that, at times, today. One mistake leads to a sack or a negative play. We had plenty of positive plays. I think it's just everybody together trying to get back into that rhythm — avoid first-and-20s, second-and-long, and third-and-25. Run out of stuff to call."

**On increasing the team's physicality:**

"We'll try, and we'll look at everything. We'll go from there."

**On Titans CB Roger McCreary's play to bat the ball inbounds, leading to an interception:**

"Yeah, a fantastic play. He had an opportunity last week, went through his hands. Great awareness. He challenged on another third down over there on the sticks — getting back up and was able to come up with a stop. So, we competed and just came up short."

**On if Tannehill came to him wanting to come back in or if medical staff cleared him to return:**

"Once they cleared, I knew Ryan — that's what he had said. I knew that the whole time."

**On K Randy Bullock's missed kick:**

"I guess he just missed a kick."