

Chargers Media Availability

Wednesday, August 23, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the defense:

“It’s a good group to coach. I think we’ve been able to really add the right type of pieces, since I’ve been here. I thought we onboarded a lot of guys two offseasons ago. Then, I thought we were able to sprinkle in the right guys this offseason. I think, getting [LB] Eric Kendricks was a huge addition for us. I think you’ve seen that on display throughout training camp. I think that we’ve drafted some really good players that are going to help us. I think you guys just talked to a couple of them, but we really feel like these defensive draft picks will help us in a role this season. I like the team chemistry of our group on defense. There’s outstanding leadership. We certainly have some premium players, but the team chemistry on that side of the ball is great. With [S] Derwin [James Jr.], [OLB] Khalil [Mack], [OLB] Joey [Bosa], [LB Kenneth] K9 [Murray Jr.], Eric [Kendricks] leading us, [S Alohi] Lo Gilman. Those guys are doing a great job of leading the way. I’m leaving out [DL] Nick Williams. Nick Williams is a guy that we’ve brought in who has been very impactful for us. Then, we’re going to get some guys off injuries that you didn’t see a lot last year, that we have a lot of confidence in.”

On the team believing in itself more over his tenure as head coach:

“I think that’s fair to say. I think, from the beginning, our expectations were to every game that we play. I don’t think our expectations have changed at all since we’ve been here. I think the belief since we’ve gotten here has grown. I think we established that belief in my first season, but I think it’s just grown and grown each and every day that we’ve been together. I think, going into this training camp, this group has put in a lot of really good work and now we’re ready to prove ourselves.”

On how that belief spreads on a roster:

“It takes time. I think, over time, you onboard the right people, whether that’s player, coaches, personnel department. You just keep adding pieces, then all of the sudden, you can really see your culture come to life. You can see the belief you need in this league — learning how to win together, expecting to win together and doing that consistently over the course of a whole season. I think we’ve done a lot of good things for two years, but this team is in a good spot to go prove itself.”

On if the team has ‘made a decision’ at kicker:

“We have not.”

On TE Donald Parham Jr.:

“Just working through some stuff from practice last week.”

On OL Jamaree Salyer:

“Same thing, just being precautionous. Nothing to worry about, at all.”

On if both K Dustin Hopkins and K Cameron Dicker will kick in San Francisco:

“We’re going to make the determination here before we leave for San Francisco.”

On the state of the team after two preseason games:

“This preseason game is going to be important to us. We’re finishing the evaluation on a lot of young guys. Guys who are competing for roles on this team. We’re going to try and go to San Francisco and win this football game and give the guys the right opportunity to showcase what we need to so that we can make the best decisions that we can. Then, for some of the guys that aren’t playing in the game, I think we were able to finish training camp today the right way knowing that we have Week 0 next week, where you have to take advantage of three practices to build yourself up for Week 1. I’m proud of the way these guys have competed in training camp. I thought last week, the work against New Orleans was invaluable. Then, these two practices this week have been really solid work. We’re ready to go for Friday night.”

On the emergency quarterback rule:

“It’s going to be interesting to see what teams in the league do with that third spot. We’ve discussed it. We’ve kept three quarterbacks in the past, but every year is a new year. I think in the next five to seven days, that’s when a lot of these decisions are going to be made. It will be interesting to see how it shakes out.”

On DB Mark Webb Jr.:

“He’s got to play in this next game. This is going to be a great game for him against [49ers Head Coach] Kyle [Shanahan] and his group and the way they play. I think it’s an important evaluation for Mark, but I’m glad he’s going to be out there for the game.”

On TE Tre’ McKitty:

“Same comments as Mark. A really good evaluation [opportunity] against a good defense, a good front, and good linebackers that are athletic and can run. It’s going to be a good game from Tre’.”

On if WR Jalen Guyton and DL Otito Ogbonnia could start the season on Physically Unable to Perform:

“I don’t know that.”

On WR Keenan Allen’s touchdown catch in practice:

“I got a good look at it, yeah. It was one of those catches that only Keenan can make. Then, we have [WR] Mike [Williams] making a catch like that today, too. Then, [WR Joshua] Josh [Palmer] made one, too. Then, [WR] Quentin [Johnston] made one. We have a lot of guys like that, where you’re saying, ‘Man, what just happened?’ [TE] Gerald [Everett] made a catch today in seven-on-seven that was like that. It’s all good work. [QB] Justin [Herbert] can put it in places for things like that to happen — and it’s great work for the defense because that group is just such a great group to compete against every day. I hope the same is true for them going against our defense.”

On WR Quentin Johnston:

“I’m really pleased with his development. I think, when he first came into his rookie minicamp to now, just the improvement that he’s made as a player — but I think what we’ve wanted to establish, and I think he’s shown it on the practice field, is that he belongs out there. He’s made plays consistently throughout training camp. Really, throughout the springtime, throughout training camp and he just needs to stay on track of improving. This was a great camp for him. He showed really good stamina throughout camp, being able to be healthy throughout camp and work through all of the things that you have to work through as a rookie. He has real toughness. He practices really hard. He’s studying. He’s learning how to study and prepare. The learning curve is huge coming from college for that position. He’s just stayed steady. Working through the mistakes, but I think you guys have seen. His ability to consistently make plays at this level is exciting.”

On the 'ones' facing the 'ones' instead of the 'twos' in practice:

"We just didn't want our 'twos' to 'die' because they've played a lot and our ones haven't. We just wanted to make sure that they're able to go compete on Friday night. Wanted to make it more 'ones' versus 'ones' so that our 'twos' and 'threes' can go compete in San Francisco."

On evaluating Hopkins with his injury during camp:

"I think it's a combination of factors that you just said. I think, their performance on game day, you know? In the NFL during the regular season and postseason. Then, what we've seen in practice. We have to factor all of that in. I think it's a good, tough problem to have, that we have two kickers that are quality kickers in the National Football League, who have both proven themselves. Again, we have some time to make that one."

WIDE RECEIVER QUENTIN JOHNSTON

On how he played in the second preseason game:

"A step better, for sure. The first one, I felt like I was confident to a certain extent. When I went back and looked at the tape, I obviously had a few drops. That was something in my book that's unacceptable, especially at this level. I took that hard. I went to practice the next week harder than I did the week before. I came back and I feel like I did much better."

On gaining the trust of QB Justin Herbert:

"I feel like he trusts me, for sure. Obviously, it's still a work-in-progress. I'm still fairly new. I obviously haven't been in a full game situation with him, but I feel like it's up there."

On areas of strength and improvement:

"The stuff I'm happy with is kind of my improvement. Just me being more knowledgeable about the game. Knowing how to run the routes at different speeds and reading the defense, stuff like that. Things I still need to work on — for me, I feel like it's being more aggressive to the catch. I obviously, had a few drops last week, like I just said, that I feel like should have been very catchable. I just wasn't aggressive enough. I'm constantly working on that every day."

On if there's any 'common theme' with the drops:

"It just kind of happens as it is. Honestly, just a lack of focus. Really no excuse there."

On how facing S Derwin James Jr.:

"I feel like it's preparing me a lot, given that he's the best safety in the league, in my opinion and everybody's opinion, I would say. I'm kind of just picking his brain, too, on and off the field. Just kind of seeing what he sees. He tells me sometimes that he kind of knows where I'm going based off my alignments. I take that, fix it, straighten it up. Then I go back, watch film and see what he does. Kind of just feeding on that. Depending on what my route is, whether I should run it fast, slow or kind of fit in the hole or whatever. I've definitely learned a lot from him."

On joint practices helping his chemistry with Herbert:

"A lot. Even though, like you said, it was practice still against a good team, it wasn't like we're just going half-speed. We were definitely going full speed. I feel like that helped me."

On if he gets down on himself when he makes a mistake:

"Myself about three or four years ago, yeah. Now, I realize that the game is much bigger than just that drop. It's how you bounce back from that drop. Usually, a while back especially, starting college off, I'd get a drop and I'd kind of let my head hang low and it would follow me through the rest of the game. I could see it on tape. Everybody could see it in the stands. I looked up and when that happened to me, it wasn't in the best interest of the team. I just have to learn to keep moving forward. Have short-term memory for that kind of stuff and catch the next one."

On if he improved on responding to a mistake in college:

"Oh yeah, for sure."

On how he improved on responding to a mistake when in college:

"Practice, repetition. Constant JUGS. Doing stuff after practice in college with our quarterback Max [Duggan]. Just going through different routes that I may have dropped. Catching that a number of times with somebody on my back and then kind of by myself. Then, ultimately going to the game and having more focus, like I said before."

On if he's raced Herbert:

"Not yet, I will say that he's a lot faster than I was coming in [*laughter*]. You know, taller guy with a long stride. We might have to see about that one day [*laughter*]."

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER TULI TUIPULOTU

On the second preseason game:

“For me, it went pretty well, I guess. I made a play, but for sure a lot of plays I left out there. Just have to keep stacking days.”

On the swim-move that led to his tackle for loss:

“I just felt like he overshot it, so I just gambled to the B-gap and had to get vertical. I was supposed to be in the C-gap. I was supposed to be outside, but I just took a gamble and made the play.”

On if he feels ‘more comfortable’ in the defense:

“Yeah, for sure. I feel way more comfortable compared from the first game to the second game. Hopefully, I’ll just keep building and keep getting better.”

On what he learned from his first training camp:

“I think the biggest thing is probably that all of the tackles are pretty good. Coming from where I’m from [University of Southern California], I know a lot of people talk smack about the Pac-12 offensive line, but this for sure is different. There’s not too big of a drop-off from the ones, twos and threes. Just have to keep competing and keep getting better with the pass rush.”

On the joint practices:

“It was fun. It was a whole lot of energy. I feel like we really dominated the first day. We still won the second day, also. It was a lot of fun. Everybody was ready to hit another team. It was really fun and a good first experience.

“I guess I just treated it like a game. It kind of is a game. We’re playing a different team. We’re running situations against them. I was just having fun with it.”

LINEBACKER DAIYAN HENLEY

On the preseason:

“Just these two preseason games, being able to be out there and get into the motions with my teammates and be able to have that communication, I think those have been the biggest parts. It’s helped slow things down, for sure. It’s making practice easier. You play your best when you practice your best. I think that’s all trying to translate.”

On joint practices:

“[They helped] a huge amount. To be able to go against some of the opponents across the league, any that we are able to, we’re able to show our different techniques and learn from the guys across from us. Just in a different atmosphere where it’s not just a ‘game’ competition.”

On his first training camp:

“Man, it’s long, tough, rugged days, but it’s better than going home and having homework [*laughter*]. Just being here, I would definitely say that this first training camp was fun and a lot learning.

“I would definitely say it’s a blessing to be in this position. To be drafted by a team that I feel like was perfect for me. I would definitely say that we have the ability and that we’re looked at as a team that’s supposed to win, I think that’s what we’re going to try to do. Try to put our effort out there on the practice field, hope it translates to the games so that we can get those wins.”

On what he’s learned from LB Eric Kendricks:

“A lot. A tremendous amount. We just talked. We chop it up. He’ll come and hit me with a couple of tidbits every now and then where we go over tape and he tells me what he sees. That mind, it’s football mind, trained in the fire. To be around a guy like that is amazing. It’s a blessing.”

On learning on the field:

“I definitely would say I’m a trial by fire type of guy. I love the action. I feel like the best way to learn is to make mistakes because, for me personally, when I make a mistake, I don’t want to do it again. You don’t want to repeat the same mistake. You want to learn from it. You want to grow from it. To be able to make those mistakes and know that I don’t want to do it in the future, that’s the best way to learn, for me.”