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## Chargers Week 18 Media Availability

Wednesday, January 3, 2024 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### INTERIM HEAD COACH GIFF SMITH

#### **On his takeaways from last week's game following film evaluation:**

"I thought that they played hard. We're settling for too many field goals, have to find a way to create some shorter fields for the offense and have to be able to punch it in to win those games."

#### **On the performance of G Jordan McFadden:**

"It was very comfortable having him out there. I thought that he performed well. I think he's improving every week. Really encouraged, felt that way after the game, just watching the film backed it up."

#### **On if he 'expects' WR Keenan Allen and OLB Joey Bosa to play this Sunday:**

"Those guys, honestly, their bodies haven't progressed like we thought they would and they thought they would. The chances are probably slim. I'm not going to rule anybody out on a Wednesday, but it's been a long time since they've played the game, so it'll probably be difficult."

#### **On 'if that is the same' for LB Kenneth Murray Jr. and G Zion Johnson:**

"No, I think they're different. They're working on the side right now. We'll just see how it goes, day-by-day, but I'd see them differently than the other two."

#### **On if WR Joshua Palmer is 'out of the concussion protocol':**

"He's not out of it, but he's progressing through it. He had a good day. We'll see how it goes."

#### **On Bosa and 'his level of disappointment':**

"I don't know if y'all got to see him, but he really was so close. I feel for him. I know that he is frustrated by it. Such a gifted player and a great team guy. I know that he is extremely disappointed that, throughout the year, it has kind of gone the way that it has. He has a lot of great ball ahead of him. Hopefully, he can get back to 100 percent."

#### **On 'the season being a battle' for Bosa from an injury standpoint:**

"I hate the term snake-bitten and all that, but it just seemed like it was all unique injuries that kind of happened to him. I hate it for him, personally. Obviously, being with him for the number of years that I've been with him and the growth and the quality of the person and player, you hate to see him go through that. But, he's a warrior. He'll battle back. He's going to play."

**On 'how bad' he wants to get a win:**

"We made a pact, as a coaching staff and team, that we were going to compete for three games. The motivation to get ready for this game is not an issue. You have seen these last two games, these guys have come out and played hard. We just have to find a way to get over the hump. As far as anything personal goes, that's kind of irrelevant to me right now. I want to do right by these guys and the organization and go out there and beat Kansas City."

**On if WR Jalen Guyton is 'dealing with an injury' based on limited snaps last Sunday:**

"No, he's not. It's just kind of how it went. Speaking to that, I thought that [WR] Keelan Doss made some good plays. Seeing [WR] Alex Erickson make the plays that he has, seeing guys that have had an opportunity to step up. Sometimes, it's just the way that it goes in the game. But, I'm really proud of how the other guys stepped up."

**On if it was 'more of a coaching decision' with Guyton:**

"It was just kind of how it unfolds during the game. It's nothing negative toward Jalen [Guyton]; it's just how it worked out."

**On OL Brenden Jaimes:**

"I think that he has performed well. It's a difficult situation when you get to your third center, obviously. But, I think he's held up well. I think he's getting better each game. I think Nuge [Offensive Line Coach Brendan Nugent] and [Assistant Offensive Line Coach] Shaun [Sarrett] have done a really good job with him. He's progressing and getting better each week."

**On OLB Tuli Tuipulotu's development:**

"I think the impressive thing is how well his football knowledge is. He's a very smart player. Obviously, he's tough, he's gifted, all that, but his football IQ is really, really high. I think he's gotten better every week. I told him when the season started, I didn't see him as a rookie. He didn't carry himself as a rookie. I think he's performed like a starter in the NFL. I think the future's bright for Tuli [Tuipulotu], I really do."

**On 'what the experience has been like' as an interim head coach:**

"That's a great question. Really, there's so much that you're trying to do during these three weeks, it's hard to really sit back and see how it affects you, as an individual. I've been extremely blessed in my life. I'm grateful for everything that's happened for me. It'll be something that this time next week, I would probably be able to answer that a little bit more clearly for you."

**On his 'pregame routine' since becoming interim head coach and if he is 'planning on doing anything special':**

"Prepare the guys. Be on point on the messaging that I want, going all the way through it. Other than that, find a way to help these guys get a win. That's really the whole focus."

**On 'playing a Chiefs team that won't be at full strength':**

"Y'all have heard me say it before: There's a scoreboard, so it's kind of irrelevant who they're playing; you're playing to win. I know that [Chiefs QB Patrick] Mahomes is out and they're playing [Chiefs QB] Blaine [Gabbert], and he's a quality player. It's still the Chiefs and it's a team that you want to beat, and it's a division game. There's enough to go into that one."

**On if S Derwin James Jr. 'got back to playing fast' last week:**

"Yeah, I think that early on, you could feel him — just the physicality, the energy he brings to everything. Derwin [James Jr.] is a great player and he can do so many things. That's one thing that we focused on, D.A. [Defensive Coordinator Derrick Ansley] and I, talking about putting him in where he can have clarity and play fast. It was great to see him play. He's a great player, he's fun to watch."

## **QUARTERBACK EASTON STICK**

### **On his 'mindset' entering Week 18 and if this week 'potentially being his last start' factors into his preparation:**

"No, not really. It's more about just finishing as a group. We've talked a lot about that the last few weeks. Obviously, this is the last one. Just trying to go out there, play really well, find a way to win and finish this thing together."

### **On his perspective of starting the last three games:**

"I've had a lot of fun. I'm really grateful for this last stretch. It's been really tough, obviously, we haven't been winning, and that's hard, and a lot of that is on me. That's frustrating, but I've really enjoyed getting to go out there every single day and be in the huddle and communicate and be in charge of the thing, going out there and playing and really compete. It's been a lot of fun. Grateful for that."

### **On 'the feeling of not winning games':**

"It's been tough. It's been a tough year, for a lot of different reasons. When you're not winning, it's frustrating for a lot of different reasons. Yeah, it's been tough."

### **On evaluating the film from last week's game:**

"Yeah, and I think that I've said it a few times, when you think it went bad, there's more good than you thought, and vice-versa. There's a lot of good things. Guys made plays. Shoot, [G] Jordan McFadden goes in there and plays incredibly in his first start. There are a lot of really good things. Guys played really hard. We're close."

### **On his stretch as the starting quarterback:**

"It's been a blast. You do this because you want to play, you want to compete, and that's what you miss when you're not in there. It's been a blast, every minute of it — the ups and downs. It's been awesome. Like I said, I'm really grateful for the opportunity and looking forward to ending it the right way."

### **On if anything has been 'different than expected' as the starter:**

"I don't know if anything is different. I think you just realize how much you miss it. Obviously, our position is so unique because only one guy plays. Your whole life, you're that guy, until you get to this point. Like I said, I've been a part of some really cool quarterback rooms. I've learned a lot. I think it's helped me get prepared for this opportunity. But, you just miss competing, you really do."

### **On if he is 'playing more relaxed since getting more reps':**

"No doubt. There's no substitution for reps, real reps in a game, in a live setting. I think every week, I've felt a little bit more comfortable. You see new things and have new experiences in every single play. You just kind of bank those and try to build on it."

### **On the season:**

"It certainly hasn't gone the way we wanted it to, the way that we would have drawn it up, the way we thought that it was going to go. Just unfortunate. That's the way it goes. Things happen. Like I said, we have a job to do. We signed up for 17 of these things and we're excited about playing the last one."

## **SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.**

### **On playing safety last week:**

"It felt good. It felt good to play fast and simple. It felt good."

### **On playing 'fast and simple':**

"Just overall. Just how I approach the game. Making it simple in my mind. Not trying to think about it too much and just playing fast."

### **On preparing for this week's game against the Chiefs:**

"For them, they're in the playoffs, but for us, it's coming out and making sure we finish. Making sure we finish strong. I know the guys out here. Every time we take that field, we always feel like we're playing for something. I know we're going to come out and we're going to finish this thing the right way."

### **On overcoming adversity:**

"You have to see the good in what you do. You have to see that it's a privilege to be on the stage. We're one of 32 teams. To be an NFL player on a team, you just have to see that a lot of work and a lot of people would be down to be playing and doing what you're doing."

### **On trying to get a win for Interim Head Coach Giff Smith:**

"It definitely would mean a lot. Everybody loves that guy. He's always there. Guys want to play hard. Guys know what's at stake. No one is showing up to lose the game. Everybody is coming to play hard and win. It would be big for us to come out and get that W for him."

### **On playing in games that have little impact on the standings:**

"This is my first time in my NFL career. I had a chance like that in high school. It's been a long time. You just have to keep playing, man. Like I always say, you want to turn that film on no matter what the record is — the record doesn't tell you if you turn the film on what it is. We want that film to look one way no matter who you're playing or what you're playing for."

### **On if it 'means anything' to eclipse 100 tackles:**

"No. We aren't in the playoffs. No."

### **On facing the Chiefs without QB Patrick Mahomes:**

"I definitely wanted to play him. Every time I want to compete against the best. Like I said, whoever shows up out there, we have a job to do. I can't wait to get out there."

### **On Chiefs TE Travis Kelce:**

"I like playing against Travis. It's a lot of fun. It's a lot of fun when we play. He's a great player. We know each other. We're not hiding from each other. We know each other. He knows who I am and I know who he is. It's always fun when we get to compete against each other, especially when it's me and him."

### **On football:**

"I think football is just about rhythm. I feel like it's about making sure you're going out there and running your plays that you feel like are successful for you. I feel like it's about rhythm."

### **On 'what it takes' to eclipse 100 tackles:**

"It takes a lot of hard work to get my body to go make those tackles. I mean, you have to get guys on the ground. It's a grown man's league. You have to make it."