

## Chargers Week 13 Media Availability

Wednesday, November 29, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

### HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

**On which Patriots quarterback the team is 'preparing for' this week:**

"All three. There's a body of work on all three. We'll need to be prepared for all three."

**On 'the challenges of preparing for three different quarterbacks' and if has ever had to do that before:**

"Not that I can think of. [Patriots QB] Malik [Cunningham], his skillset is different. He's an outstanding athlete. He was a super productive player in college. That's where things change, when he is in the game, because of what he can do athletically. Things are more similar when [Patriots QB] Mac [Jones] and [Patriots QB] Bailey [Zappe] are the quarterback. We've played against Mac. Mac has a lot of experience. Bailey has played in a lot of games, too. There's a body of work to go on. [Patriots Offensive Coordinator/Quarterbacks Coach] Bill O'Brien is a really good offensive coach."

**On 'if the preparations changes when there's the possibility of multiple quarterbacks changing:**

"Yeah, just have to structure practice so that when it's more of those two, that's kind of how they're playing, versus if Malik [Cunningham] comes in, there's just more variety with the quarterback running the football and being a part of the designed run game, and, not to mention, the loose play element, which is one of his strengths."

**On if this week's game 'has any extra added emphasis':**

"No. In the NFL, every week you have to have your full attention on your opponent because anything can happen. They have a lot of good players on their football team and they're extremely well-coached. We just have to have a really good week of practice and be prepared for a tough game. They've been in a lot of tough games and they have good players."

**On if it is 'possible' that WR Joshua Palmer 'could return to action this season':**

"Yes."

**On 'why' RB Isaiah Spiller 'has not been active on gamedays':**

"That's a good question. He just has to earn his way on the team through the practice field. I think that's the quickest answer, just has to do more on the practice field, both as a runner and on special teams, to make it on the 48."

**On Spiller's development:**

"He has improved as a player, it just hasn't been enough improvement to get him up on game day. He just needs to keep making progress. As I've mentioned, sometimes with players, it happens at different stages. You just have to stay after it, keep working at his game and good things will follow."

**On if he is 'surprised' that WR Keenan Allen is leading the NFL in receptions:**

"No."

**On if Allen leading the NFL in receptions is a 'byproduct' of WR Mike Williams and WR Joshua Palmer both being injured:**

"A little bit. Even with Mike [Williams] and Josh [Palmer], he was still one of the league leaders in catches over the last five or six years. He's just one of the top players in the league. He's a guy that you feel good about targeting any place on the field, any down-and-distance. He is one of those rare players that can get the ball when everyone is trying to engineer their coverages to stop him. He's just been one of those guys that can still catch the football at a high level, even though all the coverages are engineered for him. We're lucky to have him. He's having an historic year for him and it just says so much about his longevity, his consistency. Can't say enough about him."

**On Allen 'getting open when defenses are scheming against him':**

"That becomes the challenge, just trying to get him to places where he can get more isolation opportunities, or you can predict how they're going to double him so that maybe you can engineer something for somebody else, where they get a big-play opportunity. You're always mindful of that. We're a better team when he touches the ball, so we're always going to try and get him the ball. He's having a heck of a season, just showing a lot of toughness, showing a lot of leadership. To still be playing at this level, it says everything you need to know about him."

**On 'seeing' Patriots Head Coach Bill Belichick 'going through a challenging season':**

"Football is a tough game. The NFL is a really tough league. You can have tough seasons. This probably isn't Bill's first tough season, he has been in the NFL his whole life. He has seen it all. He's definitely the standard in the coaching profession, certainly in the National Football League. He's somebody that I've studied a lot, learned a lot from. I've never worked with him, but he's just been one of those guys that has been the best in our profession for a long time. You just respect the longevity and you respect the body of work. Going through so many different eras of players and so many different styles of play of football, to be able to stand the test of time and to have his type of resume, it really does, it speaks for itself. Nothing but full respect for him."

**On 'if it is still a thrill to go against' Belichick:**

"Always. You always want to measure yourself up against the best. I can remember when I got my first opportunity to coach against Tom Brady, when I was with the Rams. When you're going against one of the greatest ever do it, that's why you do it, to try to compete against the best. We played against Bill [Belichick] in 2021. Now, we get another chance at it. Like I said, nothing but full respect for him."

**On the 'response' from the secondary players who 'did not play as much last week following personnel changes':**

"Really good. They're pros. I thought that they played well on special teams in the game. In the Baltimore game, all three of those guys were impactful on special teams, which was their role in the game. Like I said, we're going to continue to make it competitive on the practice field to earn their way to playing on defense, but special teams, those guys, if they're not starting on defense, there'll be starting on special teams. All of those guys did a really good job in the game. Baltimore has really good special teams, so for us to play well in that phase, I thought that was a real positive for us."

**On the emphasis placed on ball security today in practice through the use of drills:**

"Always. The number one thing in your program is the ball. These last three games, we've been on the downside of the takeaway margin. Up until a couple of weeks ago, we were number one in the NFL in the fewest amount of giveaways. It's always on our mind. Starting at all of our meetings — whether it's a big team meeting, position meetings, unit meetings — there's nothing more important than that. You have to keep the main thing, the main thing in the NFL. We have to continue to do a good job with that."

**On 'building off of the performance of the defense last week':**

"The energy and the communication, I thought, was consistent through four quarters. I really thought that we met their level and played at a high level. I thought our physicality and toughness was as good as it's been. Then, I thought that our execution was as good as it's been. We executed for four quarters, that's what we have to build on. Our guys are playing hard, they've played hard the whole season, but our execution is what gave us the chance to win that football game. How we played in the critical situations in the game, it gave us a chance. I think the execution part is where we're going to keep continuing our focus. That's what we need to build off of."

**On 'three-straight games without a takeaway for the defense':**

"You can have stretches like that. What we try to measure is our attempts. What do our shots on the ball look like? [OLB] Khalil [Mack] got a football out. When we're sacking the quarterback, are we after that football? We're always talking about what were your attempts like. That's because that's what we can control. Sometimes, the ball doesn't bounce your way. But, I like the way that our mindset is. I like the way that our behavior is out there on the field. Now, we just have to put it out there on tape. Takeaway margin is a team stat. It's a team stat because it's about giveaways and takeaways. For us to go three-straight, though, that's a big emphasis for us. The more times that you get a chance to rush the passer and make it a passing game, that's when the takeaways happen, in the passing game, more often than not. That's what we're after."

## **QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT**

### **On his finger:**

"It's doing well, thank you."

### **On if he has any pain in his finger:**

"Time is the best thing. It's getting better and we're looking better each day."

### **On if he 'keeps a close eye' on Oregon football and 'roots for them':**

"Fairly close. Of course, I root for them every game that they play. I root for them all of the time."

### **On 'if college football is a conversation in the locker room':**

"Not really [*laughter*]."

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

"I think that it starts with the turnovers, four turnovers. You can't expect to win football games like that. I don't think that we created enough explosive plays. We had our shots in the red zone and we didn't convert on all those. I think those three things are the most important for our offense and that's where we fall short."

### **On if he 'takes it personally' and 'worries about his reputation around the league' when the offense 'comes up short' in two-minute offense:**

"I don't really worry about my reputation. I have to do my best to be the best quarterback, leader and teammate that I can be, and it starts with myself. I can be a lot sharper in those two-minute drills. They haven't gone our way, and that's the unfortunate part. We have to be honest with ourselves about it. We've done it before. The past couple of years, we've done it before. We have the right guys out there, we have the right plan, we just haven't executed. It's not going to stop us from the next opportunity that we get and we're going to keep moving forward and keep getting better."

### **On 'articulating what he could have done on the last offensive play' in last week's game:**

"I could have changed the play. I could have changed the protection. By meaning that, I could add the tight end into the protection, I could tell him, 'Hey, you're going to block this guy and you're not going to get on your route, and we're going to change it and I'm going to make sure that I'm blocked up and able to get this ball off.' What I thought was going to happen, I thought that I was going to have time to be able to get that route off. With [WR] Keenan [Allen], we've use it before against cover zero. I was wrong. I wish I would have changed it. I wish I would have added a guy in to block. Or, I wish that I would have taken a deeper drop. There are plenty of things that I could have done to fix that."

### **On 'communicating' to Allen prior to the play:**

"It was one of those plays that we've used against cover zero before. Keenan [Allen], he's a really smart player, so he knows that, 'Hey, I have to run this quick and I don't have a whole lot of time to be able to run around.' The pressure is going to get there, so I kind of mentioned to him to speed it up. The nickel came quickly and I wasn't able to get the ball off. That's on me to, like I said, change the protection, add a guy in to block, or make a guy miss and do something."

### **On if the communication was in the huddle:**

"No, that's at the line of scrimmage."

### **On if he 'vocalized' that to Allen at the line of scrimmage:**

"Yes."

**On 'scrambling more' as of late:**

"I think it's just one of those things where you go through your reads, and if you know if the production happens to breakdown, or you go through your reads and everyone's covered, you have to do something. You can't just sit back there and throw the ball away or take the sack. So, it's find a rush lane, maybe get a couple of yards. I think we've done a good job of protecting it up front. If things do get covered downfield, I'm able to kind of scramble around and find something. But, there's an aspect of staying in the pocket longer and making sure that you're able to make a play downfield."

**On run game:**

"I think that we're battling. We really believe in our guys up front and we have some special running backs, too. It's been tough. If we're not getting the pass game going, it's tough to get the run game going, too. It requires both phases of our offense, run and pass, setting up both to set up the other, and we haven't done a good job of doing that the past couple of games."

**On 'how involved' he is with the run game:**

"With the run game, most of it has been kills. You get one play, and if it's versus a certain front, you're going to kill to another play. I think that's kind of how we operate, as an offense. It's not so much me just changing the play and coming up with something random, it's more so this is the plan that we're going to run with, this is the look that you're going to get, and if you get this look, you're going to kill to another play. I feel like we've been pretty well prepared for that."

**On 'the biggest challenge' when facing the Patriots' defense:**

"They are really sound, fundamentally. They're really well-coached and they have some really talented guys on that side of the ball. When you pair that together, you're going to get a really good defense. We have to do a good job of watching film and having a good protection plan, especially this week."

**On Patriots Head Coach Bill Belichick and 'if there's anything in particular that he does to influence the play call and impact the defensive play calls':**

"I'm sure that if I really looked into the fine details of that, I'm sure that there are. We know special of a coach he is, and it shows with his defense — and his offense, as well. It's definitely something that you have to be aware of and keep watching film to do your best to pick up on things."

## **SAFETY DERWIN JAMES JR.**

### **On the performance of the secondary last week:**

"I definitely feel like we were connected. Everyone was calm, connected and making the routine plays that came to them."

### **On 'why' the secondary was 'more connected':**

"I feel like the guys that got the opportunity to play in the game, they capitalized on the opportunity. It started in practice. All week long, they prepared. We came out and executed the game plan. I feel like when you do that and when your number is called, and you go out and execute, that is what you can get."

### **On 'how he is feeling' at this point of the season:**

"Definitely not the way that I wanted [the season] to go. Like I said, I'm going to get out here and work hard every day. Try to control what I can control and get it fixed, and do my part."

### **On the performance of the defense last week:**

"I feel like we didn't get the last stop in the end. That's what really mattered the most, getting the ball at the end. But, overall, we were connected. It was the most we've been connected, I feel like, this season."

### **On if last week's game 'was the defense's most complete game' of the season:**

"No we didn't complete it. It was a good game, like I said, but it wasn't a great game. It wasn't a complete game. We didn't get the stop in the end and we didn't get any turnovers. If you don't get the stop in the end and you don't get the turnovers, we can be better, in that aspect. But, we definitely took some steps in the right direction by communicating and being the right defense that we want to be."

### **On 'preparing for three different quarterbacks this week':**

"Definitely, you have to prepare for all of them. Whichever guy is out there, we have to prepare for them. Like I've said, we'll be ready for whichever guy steps out there."

### **On the Patriots' group of quarterbacks:**

"I feel like, overall, right now, they're trying to get the best guy out there for their team. I feel like [Patriots QB] Mac Jones, he's a guy that they're familiar with. He's familiar with their system. [QB] Bailey [Zappe], he's a guy that can come in, too. We just need to be ready for whatever they come with."

### **On 'differences' between Jones and Zappe:**

"They're different in their fundamentals and their technique. Like I said, Mac Jones is probably more experienced in the system and stuff. We have to be ready for both, whoever is out there."

### **On the secondary's performance last week:**

"Overall, we did a great job of keeping the roof on the coverage. We didn't give up many big plays, explosive plays. When you don't give up the explosive plays, that keeps the points down, the yards down. I feel like we did that last week."

### **On of Ravens WR Zay Flowers' first touchdown was a 'busted coverage':**

"No, that wasn't a busted coverage. Zay [Flowers] just made a good play. He made a play."

### **On is evaluation of the season:**

"Like I've said, it's definitely been tough. Not the way anyone would have predicted, even myself, coming into this season. I'm in the moment, man. I'm not flinching. I'm going to keep going hard, keep going strong every day and do everything I can to help the team win."

**On the Patriots:**

"I still feel like they have a great leader in [Patriots Head] Coach [Bill] Belichick over there. Their team, I feel like, is connecting. They have a lot of guys out there that have a lot of experience, [Patriots TE] Hunter Henry and a lot of those guys. We have to be ready. You can't take anyone lightly in this league. You have to come out ready to play on Sunday."

**On 'what he sees' from OLB Khalil Mack:**

"Greatness. One of the best rushers in the league. He's balling. He's a guy that has Hall of Fame talent. Every day, he's getting better."

**On how Mack's performance has 'matched up to his expectations' for Mack coming into the season:**

"Even better. Just for him, his durability — since he's been here, he's been out there every game. He's been giving it his all every game that he's been out there."