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POSTGAME TRANSCRIPTS

Los Angeles Chargers vs. Miami Dolphins

Sunday, September 10, 2023 ⚡ SoFi Stadium ⚡ Inglewood, Calif.

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On the team's performance today:

"Give credit to Miami. They had a good gameplan. Their guys won all of the 50/50 balls in this game. They made all of the big plays in this game. We did not do a good enough job in the [defensive] passing game today and gave up far too many big plays."

On 'the issues on defense today':

"I don't think that we played the right leverages in the secondary and I didn't think that we rushed the quarterback effectively enough. Give credit to Miami. They had a really good gameplan and they made a lot of plays."

On the defense:

"I didn't do a good enough job today, getting us adjusted throughout the game. We tried. Our adjustments just didn't take shape today. It turned into a track meet in the passing game. We gave up a couple of killer third-down-and-longs that, I think, really could have changed the momentum in the game for us. It just wasn't good enough."

On the defensive pass interference before halftime:

"Obviously, really disappointing. We were just trying to get out of the half with a safe, prevent sort of defense for a last play. Obviously, we can't foul on that play. We were just trying to get out of the half. That really hurt us."

On the Dolphins' offensive performance:

"They just made all the 50/50 plays. When we were on them, when we had kind of an under and over, over and under, [Dolphins QB Tua Tagovailoa] was able to throw with accuracy and timing. Those receivers had a heck of a day today. [Dolphins WR] Tyreek [Hill] was fantastic in the game today."

On halftime adjustments surrounding coverage on Hill:

"We tried to change up some of the personnel groupings, tried to give a little bit more five-man rush, try to change some of the leverages and some of our doubles on him. Again, they made all the plays today."

On if the 'issues on defense are small, fixable things':

"You have to give credit to Miami. Sometimes games like this happened in the NFL. The last time we played these guys, it was the other way. Sometimes, you're going to have a game where you light it up and sometimes, in a game with that type of skill over there, you can get lit up. What you have to be able to do is hang in there, and then make some stops in the redzone. We had our chances today. We had our chances in the red zone and we had our chances on third-down-and-long, and we had our chances for even more takeaways and some 50/50 balls. We didn't make those plays today."

On the end of the game and what the team can 'carry into Week 2':

"We needed that stop at the end of the game. They made a tough play on the fade and we felt like we did a good job on first- and second-down. We felt like we defended well to the front side of that play, but again, that was one of those 50/50 plays that they beat us on."

On the Dolphins' offense:

"They're a really good team. They have a really good offensive group over there. They were a top-three offense in the NFL [last season]. They had a good plan today. We'll make adjustments. We do have a good group of guys. We just have to come back, learn from this game and move on to Tennessee."

On his message to the team:

"Had we come back and won that game in two-minute, this is just one game in September. Now, this is the first game of the season and there are 16 left. Whether we won this game, or we lost it the way we did, we have to come back and we got to get ready for Tennessee. We have a good football team, and so do they. We have to move past this one, learn from all the tough things that we're going to have to learn from in this game, and then get moving on to the Titans."

On QB Justin Herbert's performance today:

"I thought he made good decisions today. I thought, offensively, we controlled the pace of the game. I thought we executed our game plan. We really wanted to run the football to control the pace of the game. I thought we played with pace. I thought we made big plays in the passing game. I think, offensively, we did enough to win this game."

On the 'breakdown in protection at the end of the game':

"Just a couple of pressures and a couple of adders, where guys that had someone in coverage, secondary rush that's there. I think that we can learn from that two-minute drive, from a protection standpoint. Everyone on our sideline believed that we were going to win that game in two-minute. After that throw-away and the penalty, it made it tough."

On the intentional grounding penalty:

"They just didn't feel like 25 [RB Joshua Kelley] got out to the flat."

On the defense's pass rush:

"The ball was out. We did affect [Tagovailoa] more in the second half. But when he got to the top of the drop, the ball was out, or it was well-protected with seven or eight guys in the protection, and the ball was out. We needed to make bigger plays on third down. Those long situations, I think that was a time for us to get there, and we didn't do it."

On CB J.C. Jackson's performance:

"Not very good. Everybody on defense today that was covering did not have a good game. It was not just J.C. Jackson, it was our entire back seven, didn't have a great game. It starts with me, as the coach, and I have to do a better job."

LOS ANGELES CHARGERS QUARTERBACK JUSTIN HERBERT

On if the offense 'did enough to win the game':

"No, because we didn't win the game. We could have done more as an offense. We had that red zone opportunity late in the fourth [quarter]. Kicked a field goal there, but would have loved to finish in the end zone on those ones."

On 'scoring 34 points and not winning':

"It's part of football. We'll take a look at the film, we'll see what we did well. I thought, offensively, we moved the ball pretty well on the ground. The offensive line did a great job battling all day. I think that was really good to see. It's a long season ,so we have to address this moving forward, learn from it and get ready for our next opponent."

On the efficiency with the run game:

"I think we got some explosions, some explosive runs. That always helps when you have guys running down the field like that, it opens up the pass game. To be able to see the offensive line move the ball like that, I thought that was really good for us, offensively."

On the intentional grounding call:

"They said the back wasn't out there. I have to be smarter in that situation and have to put it closer to the receiver."

On if the game 'switched around with the lead changes':

"I think that's part of the NFL, of playing those games and staying competitive and knowing that you have a chance. As long as you have time and downs on the scoreboard you have a chance. Unfortunately, it didn't go our way this game, we let some points up on the board. It's on us, as an offense, to be able to capitalize on those drives. I thought we did some good things. We'll take a look at the film and we'll be better because of it."

On 'competitive games being fun':

"Football is always fun. I'm so thankful to be able to play this game. We went up against an incredible opponent today. It didn't go our way. Kind of like I said earlier, we're going to have to take a look at the film and get better because of it. We had our opportunities and we have to capitalize on those."

MIAMI DOLPHINS HEAD COACH MIKE McDANIEL

On the connection with Dolphins QB Tua Tagovailoa and Dolphins WR Tyreek Hill:

“That's an offseason of — more than just two guys, but those two guys are a great example — of not focusing on anything but their craft. There's a lot of noise that can occur. A lot of statements that can be made. It's the National Football League and those are two guys that really worried about the right stuff. That's the ultimate hope as a coach — all that time invested and those high standards that you're holding yourself to, that that's rewarded. I think, today it definitely was. They were on the same page for sure.”

On the offensive performance:

“I think the biggest part was that I saw a lot of guys who have really maxed out their investment in themselves and their teammates. I think it was really cool to see guys make right of that. We really didn't spend little or any time talking about last year. Just because it was erroneous, I thought. Week 1 is always interesting, that's what I spent most of the time talking to players because the whole league — really, all fan bases kind of lose their mind Week 1 and it's totally understandable. You have all of this build up and it's the first game. You can really go sideways with your emotions when things don't work out your way. People overreact, a two-score deficit feels bigger. A dropped pass feels bigger than it actually is. So, overall, I was just really, really fired up about the team playing through things — having leads, losing leads and then ultimately, say what you want, the game was won with the defense on the field. That will always be the story of how teams win or lose. There'll be a game this year, I told the guys in the locker room, where we'll have to win the game without scoring a touchdown. Teams find a way. I was really pumped about that. It was just weathering the storm, doing what you have to do on both sides of the ball. If we need points, go and get two points, and if we need to stop, get a stop.”

On getting the field goal to close the first half:

“I think it was tremendous of the players on the field, Tua [Tagovailoa] in particular. He hit [WR Jaylen] Waddle and then bought some time in the pocket, stepped up in it, which in that situation is a huge credit to the offensive line, who I thought really put their best foot forward against some challenging players. To get those points is as big as any points, especially when you win by two points or whatever. Then at the end, that's the stuff that you want to see. You put the ball in the hands of your best players, at the end of the game. I know it gives us a chance as a team because there's multiple players that want the ball in their hands.”

On if he puts stock in 'coaching matchups':

“No. The reason I kind of scoffed at something early in the week — and it has nothing to do with anything, but I find it super insulting to players to make anything about myself or a competition between me and another guy who both are not playing. It's really irrelevant to me only because the second I start saying, 'I beat somebody,' I have lost what this job is and it is erroneous. We did win an AFC game on the road and that fires you up against a team that will give a lot of people problems. As we've seen, [Chargers Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley and the boys have a lot of resolve, as well, so I'm sure they'll come back.”

On Tyreek Hill:

“I think there was a couple of them. The second play of the game was his first catch. It was a play that's probably a catch-tackle last year, but understanding the timing of the play, I think that set the tone for everything. I think it was his first catch. Then, I think the one right before, he caught a deep over-route — really, all of his catches, now that I think about it, he probably would have had half [of the yardage] last year. Understanding how to beat coverage is not something that we needed to teach him, but understanding when to separate and how to get the ball, that's what he's really majored in this this year. He exaggerates, you know, he's a natural performer so he did know some things, but it would be very, very accurate to say we saw a better version of him today within the offense. I think that is a big part of his success.”

On the team's resolve after the early fumble:

"Well, so that's kind of what we're talking about, is not making things that happen do anything negatively towards your performance. So we drove the ball down the field and we had a fumbled exchange from center to quarterback. That feeling is totally irrelevant towards what happened on that drive. That was one play and it can feel defeating. Then, when an opponent scores, it makes it even worse. That's a huge challenge in Week 1 to not overreact. I didn't see anybody, I thought the sidelines, really the captains and the players in leadership positions, had their mind right for what today was. I thought they were in for the entirety of it, were not going to get too high or too low. That's a key component in the National Football League when games are won and lost with leads or with deficits."

On Dolphins WR Jaylen Waddle:

"He was fine. He wanted to go in more. He was straining through some pain, but it was nothing that he couldn't play with. I was going in and out of, 'Alright we need you on this one, we're OK with that.' He'll continue to get treatment and be tough. I don't see it as an issue moving forward."

On Tagovailoa's performance today:

"It's validating to me because I don't feel crazy. That's kind of what I expected to happen with the work that he's done. I think he needs to continue – literally, it's the easiest most layup coaching point of all time – continue to do what you're doing. Honestly, that's where he's at. He is tough-minded enough and accountable enough that he puts, probably even more than he should, on his own shoulders. Has very high standards for himself and wants to continue to grow and get better. With that relentless approach and that consistent understanding of who you have to be on a day-to-day basis if you want to be a big-time quarterback on a big-time team – which I know is the way he looks at it. The cost is real, and I want him to keep paying that cost at whatever comes across his plate. He's as coachable as any player I've ever been around in my life. I want him to keep doing that."

MIAMI DOLPHINS QUARTERBACK TUA TAGOVAILOA

On the final scoring drive:

“It was a situation where we needed to go down and we needed to score in order to give our team an opportunity to be in the lead. I think our guys did a phenomenal job of not losing their composure in the heat of the moment, especially with the plays that happened prior to us getting that thing going, like that shot down the sideline to [Dolphins WR] Tyreek [Hill]. I'm just very proud of our guys. Our defense, they only needed one stop, and that was at the end of the game. I'm very proud of them, how they went out there. They didn't let anything hinder them from continuing to press forward, continuing to play the things that they play. Like I said, I'm just really proud of it. It's always tough to come into another stadium and come out with a win. That's a tough team, and we're very glad that we got to get the win.”

On the fourth-down conversion in the third quarter:

“For me, I have to see the sticks and have to know where our guys are. [Dolphins WR] Jaylen [Waddle] was first in my read, and Jaylen sort of slipped. I believe it was a three-man rush, so I was able to maneuver the pocket and step up. As I was looking at Jaylen, it sort of brought all those guys with vision on Jaylen outside-in, and Tyreek [Hill] was streaking on the sideline one-on-one, so I just tried to throw it out there, let him run under it.”

On Hill:

“You guys see what he can do for defenses, the problems that he offers – his speed, for one, his ability to catch the ball. It's like ‘Man, I got to find a way to stop this guy.’ He can catch the ball and he can turn a two-yard route into a 20-yard route. Things like that. What helps him is the other guy, the guy we have on the other side, Jaylen Waddle. Although Jaylen didn't get as much burn today as Tyreek [Hill], it just tells you about the competitive nature for both of them and it tells you the great teammates that both of them are. Jaylen was super excited when Tyreek caught his first touchdown on the sideline, and when Tyreek led us down there for that final drive. It's a team sport. We're very excited to have the guys that we have on our team. Like I said, it's tough, tough to come out here and get a win.”

On today's win and 'how much it means':

“They all mean a lot, it's tough to win games in the NFL. They have a lot of really good talent on their side. You come out every day preparing day in and day out, and hoping for this result, to get a win. I think there are a lot of things out there that are underrated, in terms of the things that our coaches have put out there. For instance, the ending of our second-quarter deal. We were able to kick a field goal there, but no one's necessarily looking at that, they're looking at the last touchdown, and points matter in this league. To me, that was almost all the difference in winning and losing this game.”

On his first game since Week 16 of last season:

“I was just really excited to be out there again. I don't think anything else relates to the adrenaline rush that you get when you go out there. You have the fans – even when you're warming up, you can smell the popcorn. There are just a lot of things that you just can't really emulate. Being able to go out there with the guys, it was awesome. I was very appreciative of the opportunity.”

On if he was 'surprised' by Dolphins fans in attendance:

“I really wasn't, because last year, I felt like it was sort of similar to this year. We had a lot of Dolphins fans come to last year's game. Shout out to the Fins Nation, they were probably just as loud, if not a little louder, than the Chargers home team. That could have made all the difference, as well for their communication. Shout out to Fins Nation.”

On winning a close game:

“It feels good to win any game regardless of how you win. This isn't the first time a lot of the guys on the offensive side of the ball have seen this, we were able to do that last year, the resilience and the focus that these guys needed to have today. It's the first game, you don't necessarily know what to expect from their team. I felt like they did their best and gave us their best shot. They ran almost everything that we've seen watching film. It feels really good to be able to come out with a win.”

On competing against another quarterback from the 2020 NFL Draft:

“I don't look at it as, ‘Hey, I'm competing to be better than this person or that person.’ My job is plain and simple, and it's to help our guys win a football game and help lead our team to where we want to go, and that's the Super Bowl. I don't look at it in that sense. I don't look at it as this guy is doing this and this guy's doing that. We're all different players. [Bengals QB] Joe [Burrow] plays different than the way I play. [Chargers QB] Justin Herbert, he plays different than the way I play. You take it for what it is. You're not playing against them, you're playing against their defense.”