



Josh.Rupprecht@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jennifer.Rojas@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jamaal.LaFrance@chargers.nfl.com

Brock.Anderson@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Danny.Markino@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Jordan.Colquitt@chargers.nfl.com ⚡ Leonie.Strehl@chargers.nfl.com

Chargers Week 17 Media Availability

Wednesday, December 28, 2022 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On an update regarding OLB Joey Bosa:

"No update yet on Joey [Bosa]."

On the defense's performance on third down as of late:

"I think that we started the season the way that we wanted to. Then, in the middle of the season, that's where we didn't perform very well. That kind of slipped us down. Number one, we're getting into a lot of favorable down-and-distances. I think that we're playing first- and second-down at a high level. We're getting those six-to-seven-plus [-yard situations], which is where you want to be. All three levels of third-down defense are working together. I think that our pass rush and our pass coverage are really fitting well together, our coverage disguise. I think that is really what makes good third-down teams. I think that we are rushing at a high level. It's not just about sack production. I know that we've had a lot of sack production, which is fantastic, but just rushing the quarterback the right way. Then, making sure that from a coverage standpoint that we're in the right coverage, having the right communication and playing the right technique. I think that we've done a good job of playing together. How we've played on third down, I think, is how we've played on first and second down. Our guys are playing with a lot of energy, too. There's a lot of confidence, a lot of energy, on third down. Third down is one of those downs where you need all of that. Our crowd has been fantastic when we've been at home. Certainly, against Miami and Tennessee, the crowd was a great factor. Our guys are looking forward to that down, and that is what you want on defense."

On the team's decision to forgo having a practice and a walk-through today:

"We got home at 5:30 in the morning — really, really early. I felt like getting our guys back today, with a flush-out workout and recovery session, would get their [body] clock back. It would be like a normal week where they get a day off, and then another day, then we get into the preparation. We'll treat it like a Thursday game, where we have first-, second- and third-down tomorrow, then red area and situations the next day, and then a walk-through on Saturday. I just really felt like our team needed to get itself back after a really late trip."

On whom he 'leans on' during the season:

"I've tried to really lean into the people here, on the team. I think that we have really good leadership on this team, guys who have helped me with their experiences — [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo Hill, [Special Teams Coordinator] Ryan Ficken, [Offensive Coordinator] Joe Lombardi, my coordinator. Then, a lot of guys that I'm really close with on the staff, that I've worked with in a lot of other places — [Run Game Coordinator/Defensive Line] Jay Rodgers, [Secondary Coach] Derrick Ansley, [Pass Game Specialist] Tom Arth, who has been with me. I've tried to lean on those people. Then, the people within our organization, too — the Spanos family, [General Manager] Tom Telesco, [Executive Vice President of Football Administration/Player Finance] Ed McGuire — really trying to make it more about our team, because they know me so well. Then, I really lean into my family, too — my twin brother, particularly, and my wife, Amy. I feel like they're the ones that know you the best. I feel like that's how I've been able to navigate the season."

On Pass Game Specialist Tom Arth:

“He’s a huge asset for me, and a huge asset for us — offensively, situationally and in team-building. We’ve known each other for so long. We believe in the same principles of how to run a team. Then, his background of playing in the NFL and being a head football coach and, offensively, how we see the game. Defensively, he can help me because he’s been with me for so long that he knows how I see the game. On game day, he has been great with [Director of Football Research & Analytics] Aditya [Krishnan] up in the box, situationally, helping us at a high level from a game management standpoint. You need people like that. You need people who are close to you, who know you, who can challenge you and push you in the right ways. I’m certainly glad that we have him.”

On game-planning for the Rams and Head Coach Sean McVay:

“The thing about Sean [McVay] — and this year is a good example of it — he can shape-shift based on the players that he has. I think that’s what you he has done such a good job have throughout this whole time. Relative to what type of group he has, he has been able to change for it. The way that he has been able to navigate the season with all of the injuries, it’s just a testament to how good of a coach he is. you just know, going into a matchup, that he’s going to have a plan ready for you. Week-to-week, he’s going to pour his heart and soul into that plan to give his guys a great chance to win. I think you can see it by the way that [Rams QB] Baker [Mayfield] has played for him since he got there, in a short amount of time. It’s a really good coaching staff over there. There’s a lot of pride with those players. Those players have played in a lot of premium games, and you can see it. Last week, it was on display, in terms of how they played. I don’t think that people would have predicted that type of game, but the people that know that team, that know him, definitely would have predicted that that could happen. He’s just an outstanding coach. We are going to have to have a great gameplan.”

On McVay’s impact on Staley:

“We had a really unique year together. It was the COVID [-19] year. He’s a guy that I did not know prior to interviewing with him. I knew of him through my good friend, [Rams Pass Game Coordinator/Defensive Backs Coach] Chris Shula, knew a lot about him. We spent a lot of time together in a little bit less than a year, spent a lot of time together. I think the way that we see the game, you kind of met someone that really, I think, the stars aligned that way, philosophically, how you see the game in terms of offense, defense and kicking game, how you lead, how you teach, personnel, all of that good stuff. It was an incredible year for the both of us. I know that we accomplished a lot together. I certainly wouldn’t be here without him. There’s a lifelong friend there. At the same time, we’re great competitors, even though we’re good friends. This game is going to be about competition. I’m excited to take the field on Sunday.”

On if he communicates with McVay during the season:

“Oh yeah, for sure. Mostly texts. There’s not too much time to talk on the phone. When you do have time, you’re talking to your family, most of the time. Definitely. They’ve been going through it, too. It’s great to have those types of allies and those people that know you well. We definitely stay in touch. Like I said, the coaching job that he is doing this year is just as impressive as any of the other years that he has had.”

On the ‘nature’ of his in-season conversations with McVay:

“If you see something, like after a good game, or maybe it’s a great play design or whatever — something he said that catches your eye — just showing people the respect that they earn. That’s what friends are for. Those are kind of the nature of those texts.”

On ‘pocket movement’ and if the Colts’ defense limited Herbert’s ability to scramble:

“I don’t think that is the case. I don’t think that is the nature of the defense that we played last week. We definitely have been at our best when we play like that. We have to continue to do a good job of marrying the run with the pass game and making sure that those run actions look like passes and vice-versa. We just have to keep playing that complementary ball because that’s when you can be more explosive.”

On the offense ‘not using pocket movement’ on Monday night against the Colts:

“We did. There wasn’t the success, I think, when we activated that. Then the kind of the game turns a different direction and you are kind of going with the flow of the game. I thought in the second half we ran the football at a high level and that’s what we were trying to do. Once we got the two-score lead, really tried to lean on them a little bit. Maybe where you would call some of those play-action passes, those were kind of replaced by runs and I think that’s what you saw kind of in the fourth quarter specifically.”

On appearing in the postseason for the first time since 2018:

“I think it’s the right step. That is how I would characterize it. I wouldn’t say it’s a big step, it’s the right step. You have to make the playoffs in order to be a world champion. I think that is a good place to start. That’s where we expected to be. I think our path to get here. No one could have predicted that. That’s what I am happy about, is that we were able to earn our way there. The way that we earned our way there, I think that is significant. It’s about playing our best here at the end of the season. That is still out there for our team and that’s where our focus has got to be. That’s why we have to treat this week like it has a life of its own because this is a really good team that we are playing and there is still a lot of room for us to improve. Certainly, the way we played the other night, that wasn’t our best stuff. That wasn’t our best stuff and our team knows that and that’s why we have to get to work tomorrow and have a great practice.”

On his philosophy regarding player usage over the last two regular-season games with a playoff berth secured:

“We’re worried about all of it, but we are trying to win every game to improve our positioning, for sure. You factor in those individual health situations, I think, on a case-by-case basis. That is kind of how you have to treat it. The facts are on the ground this week. We have to play this week and then we’ll see what happens next week. You are taking both of those things into consideration, but I think the biggest thing for us is we want to be playing our best football and how we do that is attacking these next two weeks in the right way and this game against the Rams because this team is going to really bring out the best in us. They are a playoff-caliber team and organization.”

On his evaluation of Lombardi this season:

“I think Joe [Lombardi] has really kept the group together. I think, offensively, it’s hard to put into words, when you are dealing with that many moving parts — both on the line and in the skill position — and your quarterback is hurt. There is a stretch there where you are having to navigate through a lot of traffic. I think through his experiences that we have been able to do that and keep this thing steady. Now that we are almost to full strength, we have to make the improvements to be playing our best at the end. I think that is what we are searching for right now is to find a rhythm where we can score the ball at a higher level and be more explosive as a football team. I think he has done a quality job. We wouldn’t be here if we weren’t able to navigate that two-and-a-half month stretch, when all of those things were happening, if he and his staff weren’t able to put that thing together.”

On a ‘natural rivalry’ with the Rams and if it adds to the allure to Sunday’s game:

“I think so. We are all in the same market. More than anything, it’s a really good football team. I think that good rivalries come from the quality of play. They have had high-quality play ever since Sean [McVay] has been there. I think that the matchup is going to bring out the best in both teams.”

On if S Derwin James Jr. is still in the concussion protocol:

“Yes.”

On the value of the players having team dinners off the field:

“The best teams are the teams that are the closest, that are the most personal. I think that, as you guys know, since I have been here, that has been a big part of what I have tried to do here with this team is to bring guys closer together. Sometimes, I think in free agency when you are able to go get players, people, I think, underestimate the transition of bringing them to a new team. Sometimes, that takes time. Relationships take time. I think what you have seen throughout the course of our season is our team has grown a lot closer over the course of the season and guys that maybe did not know each other well now know each other well. Now, they are able to get into that rhythm and establish their traditions and those things that are special to the NFL. I think that you are seeing a team that is playing hard for each other and I think that this team grows every week that way. I think you can see it by the energy that we play with, our sideline. That is a good place to look at in the NFL is a team’s sideline. I love all of that and we have the right guys on the team, for sure.”

On RB Austin Ekeler’s consistency this season despite the offense experiencing injuries:

“You said it, his consistency in performance — and it’s not just performance at the game, it’s the performance at practice, the performance in the meeting rooms and the weight room. He is just a total stabilizer. Then just the production, he got off to that little bit of a slow start, but then in Houston, he really hit that gear and then he has been kind of going fantasy crazy ever since then in terms of the production. He is one of the top scorers in the league. You just can’t say enough about him, the way he is running the football, the way he catches the football, the way he protects the passer and the way he does it day in and day out as a running back in the league. He has been a stud. He is a captain for us and having another great year.”

On Ekeler’s historic receiving output over the last two seasons:

“When we got here, one of the things I told him is that, ‘You fit the way that we want to play.’ You are most dangerous, as an offense, if your back is a weapon in the passing game and a back that can score multiple ways in the red zone and we felt like he was going to be that type of guy for us. Now to say he was going to go back-to-back [seasons with] 20 touchdowns, I don’t know if you ever have that vision, but we had a vision to maximize this guy and that we were going to really try to bring his game to life here. I think that as a coach, that’s what you are trying to do with your players is try to give them a vision for how you want to use them and then hopefully you have the proof and a guy like Austin [Ekeler] is like, ‘Hey, we had this vision for you. Here it is.’ That way, you can tell the next player. He has been great for us, and we’re going to need his best down the stretch for us to be as good as we can be.”