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Chargers Head Coach Brandon Staley Media Availability

Monday, September 25, 2023 ⚡ Hoag Performance Center ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

On 'the plan for the offense moving forward' following WR Mike Williams' injury:

"Everyone is going to have to elevate their game. We have a lot of good options on our team — obviously, [WR] Quentin [Johnston], being the first guy that is going to emerge in a bigger role. We have [WR] Derius Davis, who has continued to develop. That fifth [wide receiver] spot is to be determined, but we know what we have in [WR] Josh [Palmer] and [WR] Keenan [Allen], those guys were fantastic yesterday in the game. You guys all saw what Josh did last year when both Keenan and Mike were down. Everyone is going to have to elevate their game, and it's not just the receiving group, it's going to be that tight end group and running back group, as well. We're going to have to work through those adjustments here during the week to get ready for the Raiders."

On 'what needs to be seen' out of Johnston to 'warrant a bigger role':

"He will have more opportunities now that Mike [Williams] is not there. He just needs to continue to improve, like I mentioned after the game. You guys have seen him in practice, whether it was OTAs or training camp. We believe in the ability of this guy and we believe in the make-up of this guy. Now, he is going to get a bigger opportunity because there are going to be more opportunities available for him. It's a great chance for him to step up, and for everyone around him, too, as well. This is going to be an important transition for us, offensively."

On CB J.C. Jackson and 'to be determined' on Jackson 'working his way back into the cornerback rotation':

"It will just be determined by what he does — preparation, practice, all of that cumulative stuff."

On 'the expectation' for Jackson:

"He is on our team and we expect him to prepare and practice and continue to improve. That's what our expectations are for him."

On preparation 'has been a shortcoming' for Jackson:

"No, nothing to look into with that. Just the overall product, from the beginning of the week to the end of the week, giving us the best chance to win on Sunday."

On Jackson's role moving forward:

"Just a work in progress. It is going to be determined by what happens in practice this week."

On 'if a legal issue in Massachusetts had anything to do with' Jackson being inactive yesterday:

"It did not."

On if Jackson 'is going to take any time away from the team to deal with his situation':

"Not to my knowledge at this point."

On Jackson and 'if the team will be taking any disciplinary action':

"I don't know that, as of right now. It's a private matter for J.C. [Jackson] and he is working through it."

On 'if it will be one-for-one' in 'replacing' Williams 'or if it will be all hands on deck':

"It's a good question. It's our job — because with Mike [Williams] gone, it's a new combination of guys doing things — to make sure that new combination is featured in the best way for that new combination. I think that is what we have to work through. Now that Mike is gone, now we have a new group out there, whether it's a two-receiver grouping, a three-receiver grouping, and getting those guys doing the things that give us the best chance to be successful on offense. We're going to have to work through those adjustments. We feel really good about the depth of that group. I think that was the thing that you knew that you were going to have. You know that there is going to be attrition at some point [in the season]. We feel really good about the depth of that position. How this group takes shape, that is to be determined here in practice. Everyone is going to have more opportunities with Mike being out, so we're going to have to figure it out."

On WR Jalen Guyton:

"No timeline on JG's return to play, but he is working very hard. I think that he is making progress on that field. We know what JG can do, as you guys know. He's a proven player in the league. We're not going to put a timeline on his return, but I'm proud of how hard he is working."

On an update regarding S Derwin James Jr.'s hamstring injury in yesterday's game:

"We're going to know more in the next 48 hours for his ability to practice Wednesday, but no additional feedback on that."

On 'if it is possible' that James 'could be back on the practice field this week':

"I'm not sure of that yet."

On an update regarding RB Austin Ekeler's ankle injury:

"No new updates on Austin [Ekeler]."

On if S Alohi Gilman 'is dealing with any injuries coming out of the game':

"Just bumps and bruises."

On the performance of the run defense yesterday:

"It was a little leaky at times. Not up to our standard. Nothing catastrophic, by any means, but not up to our standard. Based on how you have to play that group, we were playing that game a certain type of way, but we need to play better."

On 'issues' regarding 'getting the run game going offensively':

"They blitzed 83 percent of the snaps with six or seven guys, so it wasn't going to be a game where the run game was a factor. You shouldn't read into that, it's just the way that the NFL is. You can't force something to happen that isn't made to happen. The way that team was playing, we played the game the way that we needed to play it. Just like in the first game, we played the game the way it needed to be played. Nothing to read into offensively, in terms of the run game. Our group yesterday, I thought, executed the game plan just like we wanted it."

On declining an offensive holding penalty on third down, leading to the fourth-down touchdown by the Vikings:

"A tough one in the moment there. Knew that [Vikings Head Coach] Kevin [O'Connell] wasn't going to kick it or punt it. The calculation of mind was: Do you want to defend [Vikings WR Justin] Jefferson for two downs or one down?"

On 'knowing' that O'Connell 'was not going to kick it or punt it':

"Just looking over there, I knew that they weren't going to kick it. If we had declined the penalty, I knew that they weren't going to kick a field goal, they were going to go for it. So, I was saying to myself, 'Do you want to defend [Justin] Jefferson for two downs or one down?' And I felt like we could get the stop. Good question, though, because it was not an easy decision in the moment."

On his conversation with Williams today:

"It's the toughest kind of news. Mike [Williams] is one of my favorites. He's one of our most important players. He's a guy that is not only one of our best players, but he sets the example, I think, from a team-building and culture standpoint, in terms of how you want to work. Just how much he has improved as a player. He had a fantastic game yesterday and was on his way to a huge performance — it was a huge performance, but probably would've ended up even bigger. It's tough. We just have to lift him up, raise him up. I just think that you see the value of him after a tough injury, you always see the reaction of the guys and just how much he means to us. We're going to step up for him and we're going to make sure that this group plays to his standard. That's our responsibility now."

On 'any interest in adding receivers from outside of the building':

"We're going to work through all of that. Our eyes are always going to be on players, regardless of the position, who we feel like can help us, but we feel good about the group that we have right here and that's who we have to start with."

On 'the biggest change to the initial plan' for Johnston following the injury to Williams:

"I just think that he's going to get more opportunities, for sure, but like where he is in those opportunities, probably where we have to determine his best path for success. We know what we have with Josh [Palmer] and Keenan [Allen], we know who those guys are and what they can do. I think, for Quentin [Johnston] it's just establishing that comfort zone and getting him in rhythm. It's not just Quentin that's going to be doing this job, it's going to be the other group of guys, too. Quentin is the right guy to be coaching, and he's going to get a lot more opportunities, but it's going to be the whole group. Again, it's not just that receiver group, it's that tight end group and running back group, too, that is going to have to elevate their performance. We're going to make those adjustments starting this week."

On 'the biggest thing' that he 'learned' from 'the way that the team won yesterday':

"I think it was how we played in the Got-To-Have-It situations, in the situational part of the game. The Middle-8, we won, 14-0 — the end of the [first] half and beginning of the [second] half. Our red zone offense, we were two-for-two. Our red zone defense, I felt like, won us the game. Situationally, our guys really hung tough there. There was a lot of adversity, as you know from being at the game or watching the game, with some of the penalties. I think that our defense just really hung in there. I felt like we had to stop them time after time, and our guys just kept going back out there. I just felt like, situationally, our guys really kept their composure in a tough environment — that environment is one of the best ones in the league — and against a team that made the playoffs. It was just a high-caliber performance, I thought, that way. I was proud of the way that the guys executed."

On the improvement as a unit from games previous:

"I thought was we improved upon, I felt, was how we played in the middle of the game. Where, in the Titans game, the way that we ended the [first] half and started the [second] half, I didn't think that was good enough because we emphasize that Middle-8 so much. In the Middle-8 in this game, we went up 14-0. I thought that the two-minute drive at the end of the [first] half, offensively, and then that two-minute stop, defensively, was a really good place to start. Then, the way that we started the [second] half defensively, I thought that was really good. To get that big touchdown by Keenan [Allen] on the double pass, I just liked the way that our group played in the middle. I thought that the other improvement that we made from Game 2 to Game 3 was in the red zone against Tennessee, we were two-of-five, and yesterday, we were two-of-two. Red zone defense, obviously, we were three-of-four, and really could have been even better. That touchdown that we gave up was really tightly contested. I felt like we played really well down there. I just thought that at the end of the game — the obvious part being at the end of the game — defensively, we were able to finish the job, compared to the first two games."

On if he's ever faced a defense that blitzed as much as Minnesota did on Sunday:

"No, I have not."

On if the blitz rate from Minnesota 'changed the approach':

"Yes. Good observation and question. I don't think you ever anticipate 83 percent pressure in an NFL game. It wasn't just like five-man pressure. It was six- and seven-man totals. I felt like our group — again, it start with your O-Line and quarterback, in terms of the identification process. You have to have the toolbox that you have to constantly be activating and utilizing throughout the game because you know on any snap that this can happen. You have to be able to evolve it. You can't just have one plan and that's it for the rest of the game. You have to be able to have enough answers throughout the entire game. I thought our O-Line and our quarterback were fantastic in the game, as well as some of the other people involved in the protection, whether it was tight ends or backs. When your quarterback can go 40-of-47, I mean, that, I think, shows you the level of confidence in the plan and the level of execution. That's what I was excited to see, was, in a really tough circumstance — and by the way, it's in one of the loudest stadiums in the NFL — all of that is happening when you have premium crowd noise. I was very proud of our performance yesterday in that way."

On if Williams' injury is to his left knee:

"I believe so, yes."

On if OLB Tuli Tuipulotu is 'ahead of schedule' in his development:

"Is he ahead of schedule? I think he's on schedule. I think he's right on schedule. This guy, we had a strong feeling about this guy in the springtime. That was without pads. When we got him in pads, I think in training camp — you weren't there for training camp, but I think if you talk to the guys on the beat, I think they would tell you that you knew he was going to be a factor. But then, I think in the preseason when we started playing games, you knew that this guy was going to have the physicality. He made a couple of big-time impact plays in the preseason. Negative plays. Then, I just think when we got to that first game — you just know when a player belongs. He's made plays in all three games and it hasn't just been like a play. I mean, it's been multiple plays in multiple games. I think, he played a ton versus Tennessee — a ton — and then he played a ton yesterday. You're seeing him play starter reps. You guys know what type of performance he had yesterday with the 10 pressures, which is among the highest rookie pressures since 2016 — since they started keeping that statistic. Then, the sack production. Just the physicality and toughness in the run game. He's an improving player with a lot to learn. I said it yesterday. A lot to learn. He's going to improve a lot. He's the right guy to be coaching."

On Jackson being inactive:

"He just has to establish the consistency and performance in all ways. Again, you earn that week-to-week in this league and that's really where it is."

On Johnston not playing as much as other wide receivers drafted in the first round:

"It's a sign of the talent at receiver. I mean, you have two \$20 million receivers, who are among the top players at their position in the league. Then, you have a guy in [WR] Josh [Palmer], who had 75 catches for us last season and who we feel like is one of the top young players in the league. Those other receivers who were drafted in different situations did not go into a receiver situation like this one. We drafted Quentin with the belief in the player. A long-term vision. Now, he's going to get a bigger opportunity. Now, you're going to get to see more of him. All he needs to continue to do is do what he's done ever since he's been here, which is to continue to make progress on the field. Over time, he's going to make more and more plays for us. We're really happy with him and he's going to get to shine in a bigger way now."

On G Zion Johnson:

"Zion had a quality performance. I thought he improved from game two to game three, but that entire O-Line group, I thought, played winning football for us. I think Zion definitely made improvements from game two to game three."

On LB Nick Niemann over the last two weeks:

"Winning performances in both performances. I felt like, as a backup player, he gave us a chance in both games to win the game. I thought he was physical yesterday. I think, looking at the stat line, he had eight tackles. Certainly, to come up big there in the clutch, we knew that was one of their top red-zone routes against one of their top red-zone targets. I think, to make that play on [Vikings TE T.J.] Hockenson in a got-to-have-it-moment — he's a guy that we trust. I think he's made a lot of plays these last two weeks. I'm really proud of his performance with EK [LB Eric Kendricks] being out."

On facing Vikings Head Coach Kevin O'Connell:

"I haven't had a feeling like that. Really because my goddaughter is like over there. Our kids are best of friends and our wives are best of friends. It was different. I mean, going against [Rams Head Coach] Sean [McVay] last year would be the closest thing to it. You're feeling like this is a family member that you're going against. You'd just rather not see them pre-game. It was special, for sure. We'll remember it forever. It's not easy. Again, like I said, just so much respect for him and how he coaches, how he leads. That was a hell of a game yesterday. Again, to me, it felt like a playoff game. That type of caliber of play and that type of intensity. He's got a hell of a team and they're going to have one hell of a season."

On interacting pre-game with O'Connell:

"I would say that it's just finding the right words because you don't have any. You don't have any words for what that feels like. I would just say that it's maybe a rare time where you're just kind of speechless. You'd like to say something. It won't be good enough. You just know how much you value the relationship, the friendship. Again, the family side of it, all of our families were there. It was a special moment for us to take the field together. It was a hell of a game. I wouldn't have expected it to be anyway else. I think we knew that it was going to be a hell of a game. Like I said, his team plays the right way. They do things the right way over there. Nothing more to add."

On the offensive protection:

"After the game, that's what I was trying to emphasize. In the postgame, I was trying to emphasize, to have that type of performance considering the context of the game, it was a remarkable performance and one that should be celebrated as such because it was a team performance. It wasn't just like, 'Oh yeah, [QB] Justin [Herbert] and [WR] Keenan [Allen] lit it up and that's why they won.' No, man. Our whole offense came alive. I thought there were a lot of good factors, but it starts with your O-Line. Let's say you had the master plan to get this done, well you still have to block them. You could have a master plan and then everyone is getting run over. Yeah, it could have been a good plan, but it doesn't express itself because you're getting run over. Well, our guys were competing. We were attached. We were physical. Then, Justin was playing with timing with the receivers, the tight ends and the backs — and did it for four quarters. Normally what happens against a defense like that is that you have one play where, oh man. Uh oh. Someone gets run over there's a turnover, whether it's a sack-fumble, an interception. Something really bad happens. That didn't happen yesterday."

On if he would also describe the performance by C Corey Linsley and the offensive line as a 'maestro performance':

"No question about it. Corey was fantastic in the game from an identification standpoint. He was fantastic in the game."

On if there's an analytics threshold for going for it on fourth down late in the game:

"I don't think so. It's just the mindset. It was convincing that way, but it was just convincing for me from a mindset standpoint, what type of game it was and confidence that we had in the group."

On if the particular field position of the fourth down late in the fourth quarter played into the decision:

"That wasn't as big of a thing. There was 1:43 left on the clock, which is a lot of time. You just know that's a lot of time. More importantly for us, is that it was less than a yard and they didn't have any timeouts. We were defending four points, not three."

On similarities to last season at Cleveland:

"Not the same. 30-28 versus 28-24. Those are two different scores. They are different games, different calculations. Again, the mindset is similar. Trying to win. Trying to win. Trying to finish. Defensively, it was a different game. I think, for us, it was the decision that we felt like would give us the best chance to win. Again, the way we defended in the game was much different than the way we defended in Cleveland."