

Chargers Training Camp Media Availability

Thursday, July 27, 2023 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

OFFENSIVE COORDINATOR KELLEN MOORE

On new training camp:

"First of all, I think it's an awesome set up. It's really, really cool. I love the environment. It's been a lot of fun, it's been good."

On if the objective is to 'open up' the offense:

"Certainly, it's something that we've talked about with the availability of the receivers and what we have on offense. We're really excited about exploring that. I think [QB] Justin Herbert has done a phenomenal job the first couple of days of just giving ourselves those opportunities."

On skillset of the receivers:

"Just such a fun group, a really deep group. A lot of really good players in that receiver room, guys that play different styles and different ways. [WR] Joshua Palmer, being that last guy to finally get on the field, it's been awesome. Really excited about him, he's done a tremendous job out here and all those other guys as well."

On the competition for the 'third receiver' role:

"We've certainly got four guys that are all starter guys in this league, and we'll play them in a lot of different ways. They're all going to play, even the guys past that will be a part of this thing as we go. I think that's a big part of it."

On developing WR Quentin Johnston and where he can improve:

"I think so much of the physical stuff he has, I think it's the mental aspect of it. Exposure to the playbook and going through it day-after-day, it adds up when you go through an install phase of training camp. I think it's really good for us to go through that process, and then we find those different roles and opportunities that best suit him."

On the tight end group:

"They've done a nice job. I think those guys are asking to play in a lot of different ways in the run game and the protection game and in the pass game, so certainly there are a lot of responsibilities for those guys. Really excited about continuing to develop those guys and find different roles for them and how they best suit."

On the role of RB Austin Ekeler:

"Austin has been awesome. Such a fun player and does such a good job for our offense, as far as bringing the energy, bringing the juice. He has a great presence to him; it's been so much fun to be around him. Certainly, the run game is a big part of this thing, if we have the ability to run the football and have a threat there, so many other things come off of that. It's something that we're focusing on throughout this training camp, especially once when we get into pads, we can finally get into the run game. OTAs, it's not set up that way, you can't get much run game out of that, so this is finally our chance to do it."

On evaluation once the team puts pads on:

"I think it's a huge aspect. At the end of the day, that's how our game is played. The offseason is structured how it is, which is for the longevity of players and all of that sort of stuff, which makes total sense, but there is an element we've got to get into pads and go through that process."

On Ekeler's skillset:

"He's got tremendous vision. He has a really cool way about him of finding the hole, finding the gap. He has great instincts and I think that's going to go a long way."

On building a relationship with the Herbert as a new Offensive Coordinator:

"Obviously, time invested in it is huge, at the end of the day. I think it's all those different conversations after every period, or when [QB] Easton Stick or [QB] Max Duggan are up, as we're talking through the plays, just continuing to be sounding boards for each other so that we understand how we see the game and mold that however we want to."

On the second running back spot:

"We're going to need multiple running backs, everyone does in this league. You can't have one guy take every single carry, it's a long season. Ekeler is going to get the bulk of it, but you've got to have other guys who can contribute and help as we go through the season. I think, at the end of the day, it's consistency and availability. It's all that is. There's a lot of things that go into running back, not just the actual running but the passing game, and certainly the pass protection, is a huge part as well."

On if Herbert 'is playing more free now' after signing his extension:

"I don't have as much exposure from past experiences, but all I see is a guy who is having a lot of fun. He smiles a lot and I enjoy that, I like seeing him smile. He's certainly having fun out here."

On Quarterbacks Coach Doug Nussmeier:

"I was fortunate to have Nussmeier come along; we've been a part of an offense together for a number of years. We've worked together in a quarterback room for most of those years, as well. I think it's awesome that any time you step away, you're in a different room or watching something else, everything is rolling just as we are used to. He's been an awesome asset."

On the potential of moving WR Mike Williams inside and creating different matchups:

"Mike Williams is a premier player in this league, so people are going to have game plans and matchups associated with where he lines up. The more you can line him up in different spots, it just makes it more challenging for other teams to focus on him."

On T Rashawn Slater:

"He's just awesome. He's steady. He won't spend a lot of time worrying about it. He's been awesome through this whole transition."

On Slater's technique:

"I just think he's so consistent. You don't see issues or mistakes that he has to repeat. He's just so consistent. It's impressive."

On watching Slater block in pads versus film:

"Once you get to the pad aspect of it, it's a different deal for the run game and protections and all of that sort of stuff. We're all really excited to get to that phase so we can see it and do that thing together."

OUTSIDE LINEBACKER JOEY BOSA

On how he feels coming into camp:

"I'm feeling as good. I'm feeling, I would say, much better this year. I'm working through a few things, as always, but getting back into shape is never easy. I'm feeling good. Today was a little better than yesterday. I assume it's going to get better every single day. It's just great to be out here. It's great to get away from the Florida heat, finally, and be in a manageable climate for once. I'm just feeling good. I'm excited. I'm excited to get the year rolling."

On his haircut:

"It's 95 degrees and 90 percent humidity in Florida. It's not very good with the long hair. I had a big, gross beard. I think I'm going to just buzz it all off by next week, so I'll be like a little tennis ball. Tennis ball head. A couple of years ago, not too long, people forget the past. I grow my hair out, they go, 'Oh, you've never had short hair before.' I was like, 'I had a buzz cut for a good two, three years.'"

On QB Justin Herbert's contract extension:

"I'm super excited for him. I was just sitting in the locker room and in the middle of a conversation and [OLB] Chris Rumph [II] goes, 'Holy.' It's like, 'Oh, what?' I thought what we were talking about wasn't that interesting, so it must have been something else [*laughter*]. It's unbelievable. He obviously deserves it. I've been giving him a hard time. I was saying in an interview yesterday, he's the exact kind of guy that you want to give that opportunity to. He's just so humble. I know he's going to do great things for his family with that money, and probably even better things for his community and a lot of people that need it. I'm super excited, he deserves every penny of it. I think he's just going to get better and better."

On how signing a contract extension can help one grow into a leadership role:

"It's an interesting dynamic. I know, personally, how I felt, it's a weird thing to be signing a contract for that amount of money, especially when you're just playing a sport that you've been playing your whole life. I think Justin [Herbert] just wants the team to respect him. Maybe he's a little worried that we'll perceive him differently after this, but it couldn't be further from the truth. That just speaks to the kind of guy he is. He just wants the respect and just wants to be one of the guys and be a great teammate. I think, maybe, it will push him a little more to be a vocal leader, but I think he's grown every single year into that role. Besides being a vocal leader, I think it's more important the way he carries himself around the facility and the way he carries himself every game day. It could be a factor, but I think he's been heading toward that very well over the last few years."

On the atmosphere at camp so far:

"It's exciting. I think everybody is just excited to get out here and compete. A lot of the young guys, I feel, are competing really hard. I love the group that we have in the EDGE room. I feel like there's not one guy that couldn't make the team if they do their best out there with the opportunities that they have. I know [OLB] Khalil [Mack] feels a lot better and I'm feeling a lot better than this time last year. It's just exciting to be out here. I'm just trying to make the most of it every day. I know I'm in year eight. I can't believe it already. I probably feel a lot older than I actually am. My goal is just to really try to enjoy every day and not look ahead. Just take it one day at a time. I think, so far, it's been a great couple of days."

On if he feels more comfortable entering his third year in the defensive scheme:

"Yeah. I mean, obviously, the more time that you get to spend in a system, the more comfortable that you get. I think D.A. [Defensive Coordinator Derrick Ansley] as the coordinator is doing a really good job of bringing the energy every single day. He's very descriptive in the meetings. He's doing a really good job. He has been on us all offseason, shooting us texts and making sure that we're up to good — I was going to say 'no good' [laughter], but 'no bad,' exactly [laughter]. I think, for me, personally, I've found things that work for me and maybe haven't worked for me. I'll make some adjustments that I've kind of learned over the last couple of years. Obviously, I didn't get too much time last year in the system. I think guys are, rather than learning to do day one, they're just perfecting what they already know. Having a guy like [LB] Eric [Kendricks] running the defense is special. He's a great leader out there. I think he's going to facilitate the defense in a way that we haven't had. With [S] Derwin [James Jr.], it's like having two quarterbacks on defense out there. I think they're getting more comfortable. As EK [Kendricks] keeps learning the defense more and more — I mean, he's been around. He gets it quick. I think it's coming together even more so than before."

On LB Eric Kendricks facilitating the defense:

"Just his communication. Whatever year he's going into, I think it's nine. He's obviously played on some incredible defenses. He's been a leader for a long time. Just to have a guy with confidence out there that's making the calls with no hesitation and just a guy that you can trust to do everything right out there. Not that we haven't had great players at linebacker position before, but it's just a step up when you have a guy come in that's an All-Pro guy like that."

On OLB Tuli Tuipulotu:

"Tuli is great. He's everything that you could possibly want in a rookie. Physically gifted. He does everything right. He calls me, 'sir,' which is weird [laughter]. 'Yes, sir.' I'm like, 'I'm not that old,' [laughter], but he's just a great guy. He's the nicest guy. He probably knows the playbook better than me already. He's just on top of his stuff, 100 percent. Just wants to learn and just wants to get better. I think the whole room of rookies and everybody else is great. Like I said, there's usually one or two guys where you're like, 'Alright, they're just here for now,' but I genuinely believe that every one of them have a shot to make this team. Obviously, you can't keep all eight, but I think all of the guys have a great shot because they're all good people. They're smart. They know their plays. They've all been working really hard. It's been a great start."

On emphasis on the run game:

"I think the run game is a big focus on both sides of the ball this year. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley has brought it up the last couple of meetings. Obviously, it's still only day two. Once we get the pads on, I'm sure we're going to be working that plenty. For me, specifically, I felt like my run defense has kind of gone down in the last couple of years. I'm super focused, obviously, pass rushing is a big part of my game, but I'm super focused on having more of an impact in the run game. I hope that trickles down to everybody else. I think we just need to be a little more aggressive up front and stop just locking on the guys in doing our job. We need to really make plays, beat a guy, get off of them quick and make plays in the backfield, which is a big emphasis for us this year."

On OLB Khalil Mack:

"I'm probably as close with him as anybody I've ever played with. He's like a big brother, in a way. Having a guy that's an elite player kind of complements me differently. We obviously have our different styles, but just as a friend and as a person, I'm really happy to have him on the team. I've said that a bunch of times already, but we all know the player that he can be and the player he is. After dealing with his foot surgery last year, he's coming out flying, feeling great. We both have put some weight on, so we're both feeling good. I think, just as camp goes on, the chemistry will grow stronger and stronger. By the first week, I think we'll be out there to dominate again."

On areas of personal growth:

"I think you're always trying to improve on everything. I specifically tried to really eat good and put some weight on this offseason, get back to my weight I was at a few years ago, where I could really use my power. Really handle guys in the run and be more effective in that part of the game."

On his playing weight:

"I was playing around 250 [pounds] last year. I'm probably 265. I mean, camp is rough. After a long day, I've probably lost some weight. I've been training around 265, close to 270 this offseason. I just think I'll be a much more effective player and pass rush with my power, and be able to play the run a little more dirty. I kind of played at that weight for my first four or five years. Just recently with the outside linebacker stuff, have felt comfortable dropping, but I think it's a big part of my game to be able to be powerful and be strong. I think it was definitely a good change this offseason."

RUNNING BACK AUSTIN EKELER

On if he is tired after today's practice:

"No, I'm not tired [*laughter*]. It's only Day 2. We have a lot of football to play."

On a Zoom meeting with other running backs across the league and 'if anything significant came from it':

"Yeah, absolutely. There are some obvious things going on with the running backs, as far as our contracts and the franchise tags of our last three guys. Really wanted to get out top guys together to discuss the situation and how we're feeling. Get our [NFLPA] president [JC Tretter] and our new [NFLPA] executive director [Lloyd Howell] involved, too, just to start creating some of that unity and making sure that if there are steps that we can take, that we're putting those on the table and at least discussing those. It's out there who was on the call, it was our top guys in the league. I thought that it was important, and it's going to be even more important going forward to continue coming together and talking about these issues. These aren't things that just change overnight. These are things that you have to have discussions about, see what people are willing to do, in all different situations, because they're different. People want to hold out, or maybe they don't, you have to have those discussions. We don't know, that's why we get together and see what is going through their minds. We'll have more of those to continue to educate and continue to make sure that we can put ourselves in a position — as a collective, not just running backs, as an entire union — to go forward and protect ourselves, as players."

On 'if anything can be done in the short-term future':

"Yes. There's a ton that we can do. One, we can control the narrative. We're starting to put out this narrative that is kind of combating against what has been out there so far in a lot of different scenes, where there's a lot of different media trying to justify why the running backs aren't getting paid. They're using these general numbers of what, for example, this is what the running game efficiency does in accordance to the passing game efficiency, but it goes deeper than that. We're not just numbers on a page, we're actual players and we all have different impacts on each team, so it's very situational, as far as what a specific player can have as far as impact on each team. That means that their value isn't tied to a general rule of statistics that you see. You could put statistics in one way or another to say that someone is worth something or that someone is not. One of those things that we can do right now, in the short-term, is continue to put the narrative out of why we are important. If you look at [Giants RB] Saquon Barkley, for instance, if you go into that organization and ask, 'How crucial is Saquon Barkley to the success of this offense?' It's going to be pretty significant. What that type of player can add — same with [Raiders RB] Josh Jacobs and what he did last year, [Cowboys RB] Tony Pollard, he's coming up. Those guys, when you have that success and you get put into a situation where these narratives are putting you down, as far as, 'Well, can you keep doing it?' We're the only position right now that seems to be getting punished for our production. It frustrates us. That's where we have to go out there and put out the narrative that, 'Hey, we are actually important to these offenses.' Go ask these offenses, ask ourselves, and start talking about it in the media so that we can start combatting this narrative. That's what we can do in the short-term."

On Colts Owner and CEO Jim Irsay's comments regarding the rights granted through the Collective Bargaining Agreement:

"He's not wrong. The franchise tag is in the CBA. But, the reason that the CBA is what it is is because we fought and clawed, trying to continue to pull rights for ourselves, as players. You can go back to where there wasn't even free agency and when there were two-a-days. Now, we have all of these protections for ourselves. Us, as players, have to come together and say, 'Hey, we have to stand up for ourselves because if we don't, we're going to get dragged through the dirt and we're going to get controlled.' We have to protect ourselves. How do we do that? We have to come together. When we have things that come up, like this, it's when we have to make sure that we come together so that we can protect ourselves."

On the challenge of the issue being position-specific and 'not across the league':

"As individuals, as running backs, we have to continue to bring our narrative together to help each other out. When it comes to a full collective, we have to see if there is something in this that actually could affect everybody across the board. And it is the franchise tag. If we attack that, that is something that every single position has run into. We've seen it with the safeties, we've seen it with tight ends. It could happen to any position group. We're just the ones that it's playing out through right now. It comes down to us being a union, so we have to put all of the things that we want to see changed in the future on the table, then, is this something that is worth fighting for or is it not? It's not for me to decide, it's for us, as a collective, to get together. CBAs do run every 10 years. There is some time that if you build this collective, you build this narrative, then, every year at meetings, these are the things that we're talking about."

On Offensive Coordinator Kellen Moore and how he sees the offense 'playing out' for him:

"I see it playing out as an amazing opportunity for not only myself, but for this team. Obviously, Kellen Moore has had a lot of success. He's attempting to bring that to us with our chemistry of who we have. We have some great players. I just talked to him after practice today and I was like, 'Man, I'm excited.' We were making plays, guys were flying around, we were having fun. Guys are healthy right now, so there's this energy feel to it. [QB] Justin [Herbert] is balling out these first couple of days. He got his big contract. We're going in the right direction. I feel so good about where we're going in the right direction. I feel so good about where we're going. Kellen coming in and meshing it all together, we'll see, time tells. Coaches really don't get judged in the preseason, they get judged during the season, as we all do. It's a little bit different, we still have to make the team and stuff like that, if you're a rookie or still trying to establish yourself. We'll see how it plays out. I'm looking forward to that."

On if he can 'separate the business aspect from on-the-field' with his contract situation:

"When it comes time to football, we have to focus on football. There's a time and a place for all of that. Like I was saying earlier, it's situational. You have some guys that might try to combat it in a different way. For me, I was trying to get as much value as I possibly could and was looking to have some more years with the Chargers. Obviously, went through the trade to try to find value somewhere else when they kind of shut the door on that. Then, came back to the table and was like, 'Hey, can we do something? Can we do something because I'm adding a lot of value to the team.' They didn't have to do what they did, so I'm very appreciative of this organization for saying, 'Look, we're not going to do what you want to do, but here's at least something.' It's a start. For me, that's what I'm appreciative of. I'm out here now. It's time for football, it's time to focus on the bigger picture. As far as contracts, which is these franchise guys, that's where my effort is, as far as the contract talk. I signed a four-year deal, so I'm locked in. I love being here. I want to be here longer. My time for that free agency hasn't come yet, so I'm not in that situation yet."

On 'convincing decision-makers in organizations to make a change':

"That's where a lot more collaboration comes in. It's going to take more than just a narrative change because they're the ones that started the narrative. Why did it start in the first place? They're looking at something that is showing them that they don't need to do this to this group or these people, so that will take some more offseason planning. I don't have an answer for that now. That is going to take our entire union, putting on the table, is this something that we would actually want to attack or not and for what reason? It's more strategic than that. I do know that we have guys that are frustrated. In the past, that's when a lot of changes happen, when we have a collective of guys frustrated, especially if that can apply to other guys in our union."

On 'snaps played' influencing pay rate and potential incentives:

"I think that we just did that. If I'm not mistaken, our pool was either three or five million, and now it's like eight million for player performance. Those player performance bonuses are already going up significantly. There's also some ratio as far as your play count. But, I think that it's different. I don't think that it comes down to bonuses or anything like that, I think that it's more of the principle of not allowing players to have an open chance to go and find value in the market, and then tagging them on a one-year deal — giving all of the risk to the player on a one-year deal — the organization now gets to say, 'OK, let's see what happens this year.' If Saquon Barkley runs for 3,000 yards, they might franchise him again, and out of principle you're not allowing these guys to actually go out and find value for themselves. It seems like a very one-sided option that's in the CBA. It's not something that is going to change overnight, but that is just how I see it. It's not necessarily that we have to give running backs bonuses and things like that, we just need to change the way that we're able to be controlled when it comes to the end of our contracts."

On Herbert 'being able to play fearless' after signing his extension:

"It's great. This guy, I thought that he was playing fearless before [*laughter*]. He was going out there and slinging it around, having success. If he feels that way, that's great. Feeling is very subjective to the person that is feeling those things. I don't know what you're feeling right now — if you're nervous or you're excited. Us, as football players, often times we have to mask our emotions. If he is saying that that is going to take some weight off of his shoulders because he has some more dollars in the bank account, even better."

On 'what it would look like' if Herbert 'played more fearless':

"I've been seeing a little glimpse of it out here. I don't know if you guys watched practice today, but balls are flying all over the place and getting caught. I'm like, 'Let's go.' That's what I told Kellen [Moore], I was like, 'I don't know about you, but we're looking good, man.' Excited for it."