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Chargers Training Camp Availability

Thursday, August 12, 2021 ⚡ Jack Hammett Sports Complex ⚡ Costa Mesa, Calif.

HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On facing his former team, the Rams, in his first game as a head coach:

“To be truthful, my mind hasn’t gone there yet. My mind is so on what just happened out there at practice. I think we’re going to transition to that sort of way of thinking here in the afternoon when we’re kind of starting our preparation for the game. I’m sure that it’s going to be exciting, number one, just to have our first game together in the preseason. Our guys are putting so much into this. I’m excited to see them compete more than anything. What I’m most excited for is to see our players get a chance to compete in front of the world and show everybody what they’ve been working on. As it relates to those guys with the Rams, all of those people mean a lot to me, that were there. I’m sure that I’m going to get to see a lot of them. Without all of those people, I wouldn’t be here. It’s going to be a really cool thing to re-connect with them and see what they’ve been working on. I’m excited to see them, but, really, more than anything, I’m excited for our players to get their first chance to compete.”

On if QB Justin Herbert will play on Saturday:

“Justin will not play on Saturday.”

On WR Mike Williams:

“Mike Williams has a little bit of a hip flexor that we are being careful with. He actually had an awesome one-on-one session, then felt a little tight. This being the last practice of the week, we just wanted to be careful with him. Mike is having a really good camp. He had a really good scrimmage the other day. Definitely just precautionary. If this were a game week, he would play.”

On if he will ‘script plays’ for the preseason game on Saturday:

“We don’t do a lot of game-planning for the preseason. What we want to make sure is that our guys have a framework of who we’re playing against, their base structures. The personnel is going to be vastly different because we don’t even know who is going to be out there for them. We do want to give our guys a sense of who they’re playing and how that team plays. In terms of the actual game plan, that’s not how we approach it. We’re just going to run our stuff that we’ve been practicing and give our guys a chance to go compete and really prove themselves. This will be our first crack at doing it. I’m really looking forward to it.”

On if S Derwin James Jr. will play on Saturday:

“Derwin will not play.”

On LB Kenneth Murray Jr.’s injury progress:

“He’s loosening up. He’s been doing a lot more on the side. He’s been able to really start to loosen that thing up. If this were a game week, he would play. Similar to [WR] Mike [Williams], most of it is just precautionary. That little swelling that was in there is going down. He’s feeling really good. We’re excited to get him back next week.”

On if DB Mark Webb Jr. will not play on Saturday:

“Yes. Mark is doing better. He was out here. He’s running fast. We’ll get him back for next week.”

On if he ‘would like’ James to play in the preseason:

“I would not. Our practices are going to be a lot more like games than these preseason games. The environments that we create on our practice fields is where the real action is in the preseason for guys like him. I’ve been so excited to see him compete against all of the special players that we have. We feel like that’s the right environment for him to get ready for the season.”

On if Herbert will play at all in the preseason:

“He will not.”

On if QBs Chase Daniel and Easton Stick will each play one half on Saturday:

“We’re still working through that. I would anticipate a setup similar to that. What we want to be able to do in these three preseason games is really give those guys a chance to compete equally with the right offensive line in front of them. You will see Chase go out there first, and then Easton will go out there second on Saturday.”

On if any of the first-team offensive linemen will play on Saturday:

“We’re going to have a big meeting tonight and work through a lot of those specifics. You will not see all five of them out there, for sure. As I mentioned, what’s really important to me and to us, as an organization, is that on these practice fields, that’s where the real comradery is happening. Next week, we get a chance to play against San Francisco in these practices. That will be much more like a game than any of these preseason games would be. That’s why we spend all of our time pouring into these practices. To your point, we can create that comradery. We can create that cohesion. We can create those game-like situations where those guys can figure things out together. That’s a big hallmark of how we want to do things so that we can keep those guys out in the preseason. Looking forward to seeing those guys continue to improve together.”

On if T Rashawn Slater will play on Saturday:

“Rashawn will play.”

On if CB Asante Samuel Jr., WR Josh Palmer and TE Tre’ McKitty will play on Saturday:

“Yes, our rookies will play in the preseason.”

On ‘if there is any benefit to the preseason’:

“It’s a topic that, probably, the beauty is in the eye of the beholder. Every coach is probably going to tell you a different story about how he feels. I think a lot of it is relative to where your team is at. Do you have a veteran team? Do you have a young team? Do you have a team that’s in the middle? What’s your quarterback situation like? I think that there are a lot of factors that go into it. I wasn’t in college too long ago. They don’t have preseason in college and it seems to work just fine there. Last year, we didn’t have it and teams did just fine without it. There are a lot of factors that go into the preseason timetable that I think are a big consideration; travel, logistics. I’m learning a lot as I go in the NFL about the preseason, but I know that we’re going to take advantage of these games the best way that we can. That’s the thing, you get three opportunities and we’re going to try to take advantage of it the best we can.”

On if WR Keenan Allen will play at all in the preseason:

“He will not.”

On RB Joshua Kelley:

“Josh is getting confident. I think that he’s a really good fit for the style of runs that we have in our scheme. I think that he has shown himself in the passing game, which has been a pleasant surprise for us. He’s really shown some toughness in pass protection. His brain works in pass protection, too, which is important. We have a really exciting competition going on in that running back room. Josh is a great competitor, great person. I’m excited to see him when it’s live, tackling to the ground, to show what he can do.”

On if his relationship with Rams Head Coach Sean McVay impacts how he ‘strategizes’ prior to Saturday:

“I don’t think so. I’m excited to compete against a good team that’s well-coached, that’s well-schooled, and that we have good respect for. I’m excited for that. As it relates to the preseason, it’s going to be such a different atmosphere than if we were truly playing a game. But, I know that we’ll get great work because I know the coaches that are on that staff, I know a lot of the players. I’m excited to see a good on good situation because of the familiarity. That part will be fun.”

On the expected atmosphere at SoFi Stadium on Saturday with fans in attendance:

“I’m excited to see people in powder blue there at the stadium, too. That’s our expectation, that people are going to be excited to watch our guys compete. I’m excited for our fans to be there, too. I know that our families are going to be there, too, so we’re excited to compete in front of them. No matter where we play, I know that our guys are going to be ready to play. That’s going to be a big part of our mission statement here: No matter what the environment, no matter when the game is — preseason, postseason — that we’re going to be ready to play. This is our first chance to do it together.”

On CBs John Brannon and Kemon Hall:

“Both of those guys have improved so much since the springtime. J.B. and Kemon have improved so much. I give so much credit to [Secondary Coach] Derrick Ansley, who is a superstar coach, as you guys will get to know. [Assistant Secondary Coach] Tommy Donatell, who is a superstar coach, who you guys will get to know. [Defensive Coordinator] Renaldo [Hill], who you know a lot about already. Those guys have really poured into their game. With Kemon, he gives you a little bit of inside-outside flex. He can play star and he can play outside. He has a really good body type for special teams because he is strong and he’s fast. He can do a bunch of jobs on teams, as well. [Special Teams Coordinator] Derius [Swinton II] really has some like for him. A lot of it is going to come down to how they play in these games. We see these guys on the practice field, we love what we see. Now, they get that chance in a game environment against other people. J.B. has come on, too. He’s really made some big jumps the last week in particular. I think that the installs slowed down for him. Now, he has a great understanding of how we want to play. He’s working through all of those little things that make such a big difference in your game. Two good examples. There are a lot of positions that I could say the same thing about. I’ve been really pleased with both of those guys.”

On if he will call the defense for the entirety of Saturday’s game:

“Yes, sir. I will.”

On Herbert’s ability to ‘block out the noise’ and if he talks about that with his players:

“In our first team meeting, we talked a lot about being fully present. Don’t forget what your job description is. The reason why all of you are here is because you are a football player. Being the best you can be as a football player is going to help you with all of the things outside of your football career that are so important nowadays. A lot of people don’t understand that what goes on off of the field is very important to a player’s future. You can have both of those things at the same time. You can have a great life off of the field where you’re trying to create a brand and you’re going to try to create opportunities for your family’s future, but when you’re a football player and you’re on the field, in a meeting, in the weight room, you have to be fully present in order to be your best. I think that’s something that Justin has a talent for, understanding the focus and what fits him best. All players are a little bit different. What he does a good job of is being fully present. That’s how you improve. That’s why, I think, you have seen him have the camp that he’s had so far.”

On if TE Jared Cook, C Corey Linsley and T Bryan Bulaga will play at all in the preseason:

“Those guys that you mentioned will not play. We’re going to have a meeting tonight and we’re going to talk through our team. Like I said at the stadium, it’s going to be a case-by-case basis, but the guys that have proven themselves — like those guys that you’ve mentioned — in a big way, they’re not going to play in the preseason.”

On if he has discussed preseason playing time with the players:

“We’ve had most of those conversations. The few that we have left will happen tonight.”

On the response he's received from the players after discussing preseason playing time:

"Good. We've been really transparent from the beginning with these guys. I think that's what they'll tell you, that we've been really honest with them since the springtime about why we're doing everything in practice. When we set up training camp, it was really important that we really engineered our practices for a lot of those guys that you're mentioning and making sure that we pour into them so that they get the work that they need; the right type of tactical work, the right type of physical work. That's been a big part of designing this thing. When they understood that, now they know how to operate. They can truly be their best. They've helped me a lot. Our coaching staff, our sports performance staff, our personnel staff have helped me a lot. We're excited to see it take shape in the next couple of weeks."

On if RB Austin Ekeler will play at all in the preseason:

"He will not play in the preseason."

On if S Nasir Adderley will play at all in the preseason:

"Nas will play in the preseason."

On Palmer:

"He's doing great. He just had a personal issue back in Nashville (Tenn.). Took care of it, came right back and jumped right back into practice. He's doing well."

On Webb:

"Mark Webb will be back next week. He's running really well, running really fast. We're going to hold him out of this game to be sure, and then get him back next week for the practices with San Francisco."

On DL Cortez Broughton:

"Tez has a groin. I think that if it were a game week, he would play. He's kind of similar to [WR] Mike [Williams] with his hip flexor where I think that they would play if it were a game week. We're just being careful. He's had a good camp. We just want to make sure that he's good to go. Similar to [DL] Christian Covington, if I had to compare it. He'll be back in sort order."

GUARD ODAY ABOUSHI**On the working with Duke Manyweather alongside of T Rashawn Slater:**

"I've been with Duke now for about three years, three-and-a-half years. I feel like I've gotten better technique-wise with Duke. Strength-wise, [we've done] a lot of offensive linemen-driven techniques and drills when we train. As far as that aspect of my game, I feel like he really helped me develop into the player I am today. Having Rashawn there and being around a bunch of the vets, it gave us the chance to pick everyone's brain. We really fed off of each other's energy. It's nothing but good vibes down there. We worked hard, and got a lot of good work in."

On Slater working with Manyweather last year:

"I think it gave him more time to get strong and work on his technique. He had more time to focus on himself and not on the issues that he was dealing with at Northwestern. You just get to focus on football down there and I think it shows. He definitely got stronger in a lot of places. His technique is great. He's a great athlete off the jump. He bettered his game."

On the offensive line's communication development:

"I think it's gotten better and better every day. We're not perfect, but we're on our way to getting there. Every day is a grind and every day something else comes up. We just work through it. Having the kind of experience we have up front and across the board is allowing us to see things a little faster. It's allowing us to be on the same page without really having to say anything. We all see everything through the same lens, and we go the direction we need to go without necessarily having to make a call. It's a process, but we're moving forward every day."

On his acclimation to the team:

“We’re 13 practices in so I feel pretty comfortable. It’s been good, the vibe is great. [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley is amazing, his energy is solid. Working with [Run Game Coordinator/Offensive Line Coach] Frank [Smith] is great, as well. Having the group in the O-line room from top to bottom, everyone has a good personality. There’s a good vibe in there. Everyone comes to work to work each day. That’s all you can really ask for.”

On C Corey Linsley:

“He’s strong. He’s smart. He’s fast. Having a lot of experience playing in Green Bay, I’ve seen him play a bunch. Seeing how he goes about his business is something that I admire. Getting to play next to him now and being able to watch how he goes about his business; I try and pick up things from him. I try to see how he sees the game. I try to be on his same page, and he makes me want to elevate my game to the level he plays at.”

On the importance of having a solid center for the functionality of the offensive line:

“What it comes down to is having an anchor in the middle who runs the show, and Corey’s [Linsley] that guy for us. He runs the show smart. He’s a good, strong player. To have that solid area right in the middle spreads out through the rest of the line; from me, out to [G] Matt [Feiler], to [T Rashawn] Slater and [T] Bryan [Bulaga]. That staple is huge for us.”

TACKLE BRYAN BULAGA**On mapping out a plan for this season, coming off of last season’s injuries:**

“We met up and came up with a plan. I think what we talked about earlier was about what has worked and what hasn’t work. [Head Coach] Brandon [Staley] spoke to me about what he suggests with something. I found in the past what works for me, so I was happy that. He set that fourth and we’ve been feeling consistent with it to make sure that nothing creeps up and hampers me during camp.”

On how this year’s training camp plan compares to ones that he experienced with the Packers:

“I think what [Head Coach] Brandon [Staley] is doing for me this year matches similar to what I did in ‘19 with [Packers Head] Coach [Matt] LaFleur in Green Bay. It also matches the plan that we were doing here, so I felt really good. Right now, my body feels good. Nothing has crept up on me, so everything has been going well so far.”

On the imperative placed on the athletic training staff in training camp:

“This is a big time for the training staff right now. It’s a big time of the year. There’s a big roster and there are guys getting nicked up throughout camp. It’s a physical time, a lot of practice and a lot of reps. Between the weight staff and the medical staff, it’s a big, conjoined effort to make sure guys are staying healthy at a peak level. That’s key. Guys are trying to win jobs, and if your body lets you down, you can’t compete for a job or get ready for what’s coming. This is a physical time and the training staff has been on it getting the guys what they need. So far, so good”

On his emotions last year:

“It was a frustrating year when the back injury happened. I have never experienced anything like that. For 10 years, my back has been pretty good to me. When that happened, it was a nick in my season, because I didn’t have any experience with how to bounce back from that. It took me a long time to recover from it and get my body back into place to where I felt it was good enough to perform. With that injury things kept creeping up in the season. You don’t have the necessary time to let that thing fully recover and let it settle down and truly heal. So, you’re trying to push that into something when something isn’t healed. The slightest movement, pressure and certain positions, fire that back up and maybe even injure it a little bit further. It was just an up and down season last year. Thankfully this year, knock on wood, I had a good offseason rehabbing it and getting that area nice and supported. So far, my back has felt good. It is something that the training staff and Brandon [Staley] are aware of it. Backs can pop out on you like that and it’s something that we are very aware of and continuing strengthening to make sure that that part of my body stays fresh”

On Slater:

“He is a really good football player and continuing to get better. It’s tough as a rookie. I was there once a long time ago. I think he’s doing a good job so far. He took a year off after the pandemic and he didn’t come back for his junior season, so camp was his first football-type activity. Camp was the first type of activity that he did in a year besides training and doing position drills, wherever he was working out at. It’s different out here, when you’re going against players like [OLB] Joey [Bosa]. The speed and everything is way different than college. Then he took a year off, so it’s about getting adjusted to something that’s faster. I think he’s doing a good job. He’s come out here and learned the playbook really well. He’s asking the right questions during meetings. Something that I always find a very good sign for rookies is when they come to here make a mistake, they learn from it, then come back out here and don’t make the same mistake. Now, they may make a different mistake, but it’s not the one they were corrected on the day before. They understand what the deal is. Rashawn is a really smart kid. So far, he’s been very impressive and he’s continuing to get better. There is going to be ups and downs in a rookie year. For everybody, no matter who you are, it matters how you react to that and fight through that. Keep your head down and keep grinding with it. He’s got all the traits to get through that.”

On the offensive line developing ‘cohesion’:

“I think there are things that we still want to accomplish and feel good about as an offensive line. We still have three or four weeks left until the opener. Growth doesn’t happen on the practice field, it happens in meetings. Like Rashawn [Slater] is just a rookie, but we have a good veteran group. We have meaningful discussions and important discussions. We go over things that we see, that’s going to help the group grow. The younger guys can hear that and see that and continue to grow, too. They are competitive and they are fast, which is great. The pace here is you’re getting your work on the field, you’re going, then you’re done. There’s no extra stuff. The practices have been fantastic. If we want to continue and improve, we must get better and make sure when we kickoff, we are at full speed. Obviously, the defense we are going up against in Week 1 is very good. You have to make sure that we are growing in these next three to four weeks, building up and getting ready to go for Week 1.”