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Chargers Week 18 Media Availability

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HEAD COACH BRANDON STALEY

On preparing for the Raiders:

“Number one, I have a lot of respect for the Raiders. Their path this year, they’ve been a really resilient team. They’re playing outstanding football here down the stretch. They’ve had three really tight, quality wins to put themselves into this position. I have a lot of respect for the job that [Raiders Interim Head Coach/Special Teams Coordinator] Rich [Bisaccia] has done, a lot of respect for their players. They’re a very complete team in all three phases. It’s going to be an outstanding game on Sunday night.”

On the challenge that Raiders WR Hunter Renfrow presents to a defense:

“Hunter’s having a fantastic season. He’s having a fantastic career. This guy is one of the premium inside receivers in the National Football League. He’s a very complete football player. Obviously, he can return, as well, but does a lot of things for them; blocking receiving, he’s a real weapon for them and a tremendous player. He’s definitely one of the biggest reasons for their success this season.”

On preparing for the Raiders’ defense:

“Their front seven is played extremely well. It’s definitely a strength of their team, if not one of the biggest strengths of their team. [Raiders DE] Maxx [Crosby] and [Raiders DE] Yannick [Ngakoue] coming off of the edge — [Raiders DT Quinton] Jefferson, [Raiders DT Darius] Philon, [Raiders DT] Solomon Thomas, those guys are outstanding. [Raiders LB] Denzel Perryman is having a tremendous season for them, [Raiders LB] Divine Diablo, [Raiders LB] Cory Littleton, [Raiders LB] Nick Kwiatkoski, who I coached in Chicago, they have a very quality group — [Raiders LB] K.J. Wright, I’m not going to leave out K.J. K.J. is one of the great linebackers of the last 10 years, him and [Seahawks LB] Bobby [Wagner] being a tandem for so long. But, their front seven has really controlled the line of scrimmage, and that’s where it started. That’s given them a lot of opportunities to rush the passer, which is one of their strengths, how they rush. They have some very good pressure packages, as well. Their defense has definitely been a huge reason for their success the second half of the season.”

On if this week’s gameplan has elements from the Week 4 matchup’s gameplan:

“When you go back, there have been so many games that have happened between then and now. I think you just go back to see what was similar to who they are now, and if there is, then maybe you can make some comparisons and maybe there are some things that you can activate in the plan. But, both teams are so different. I think that it’s going to be a different ballgame, a different plan of attack. But I definitely think you can go back, from a matchup standpoint, and see how they were using some of their guys. If those themes have stayed the same, or if they have changed between that space in between. I think it’s going to come down to who executes better on Sunday.”

On Chargers players experiencing ‘career seasons’:

“I think it says a lot about this entire organization. I think that it says a lot, number one, about the players because they deserve the credit for their improvement because they’re the ones who are having these seasons; they’re the ones who have invested in their game. In supporting their game, I think us coaches, our sports performance staff, everybody within this organization, it really takes a village to be able to support these guys and to bring out the best in them. I told you guys that it starts with relationships with these guys and being able to tap into the personal side of things, and then the specifics of their job and where you feel like they can improve, and giving them a vision of how they can get there, and then staying with them throughout the season and make sure, as you go, that you’re getting better, where it doesn’t just plateau. These guys continue to improve as the season goes. I’m really proud of our coaching staff. Like I told you guys, character and capacity, being an outstanding teacher, and then being an outstanding person, I think that that really helps in helping a player improve, being there for the players in good times and in bad times, and I think that we’ve been able to do that with our guys. I’m really proud of the guys that you mentioned and a lot more because that’s what it is about for us, allowing these guys to be as good as they can be.”

On Raiders QB Derek Carr:

“I think Derek has been a model of consistency. I think he’s been a real rock for that football team. They were in that juncture, probably in the middle part of the season, where things could have gone a couple of different ways for that football team, but I think he was able to stay steady. As I said the first time we played him, I’ve played this guy several times and he’s one of the premium passers in the league. I think that he’s demonstrated that once again. He has one of the quickest releases in the game. He’s very accurate, super sharp at the line of scrimmage, super sharp post-snap. There are not very many things that he hasn’t seen. He’s been a clutch player for them this year, and no bigger example than the last couple of weeks — Indianapolis, Cleveland — being able to bring them back at the end of the game. He’s having an outstanding season for them and definitely has our full respect.”

On the injury status of C Corey Linsley and LB Drue Tranquill:

“I think that they’ll both be in the walk-throughs today. I know that Drue is going to be out there in individual, I think in a limited capacity. With Corey, we’re just going to be careful with him at the beginning of the week, and then listen to his body as it goes.”

On updates to the team’s Reserve/COVID-19 list:

“[TE] Jared [Cook] came off of the COVID list this morning.”

On ‘how much better of a team they are’ since the Week 4 meeting with the Raiders:

“I think we’re just a lot more certain of who we are. As a team, I feel like there’s so much that’s happened in between that we’ve learned from, so many experiences; wins, losses, injuries, COVID, there are so many things that have transpired that have made our team a better team, a more connected team, a more complete team. That’s always your quest, as a coach, is to find your best football at the end. Hopefully, we can say that here. Just excited about getting after this week of preparation with our guys because that’s been the thing that I’ve been so pleased with, with our operation here, is just the way we’ve prepared each and every week.”

On if preparing for a 17th regular-season game ‘feels odd’:

“It feels the same for me because every game I feel the same way. I feel that level of intensity, that level of focus, that level of detail that it requires. When this means everything in the world to you, every single game you play, then this game is not going to mean more than the next. They all mean everything to me as a competitor. That’s the type of mindset that I want to create around here, where every game brings out the best in you because it’s an opportunity to showcase who you are as a competitor. The fact that there’s a lot at stake now, we just have to play our game. We have to focus on our execution, our energy and plan our brand of football. It’s going to be a whale of a game. The storylines, as you’ve mentioned, they’re all there, but the real storyline for us is competing to the best of our ability.”

On the importance of field position and special teams this week:

“It’s always critical, field position, the specialists and being able to not only control the vertical field position but make sure that your ball security, that side of things, is also at a premium. I think that in tight games like this, all three phases are going to matter a lot. We have full respect for them. They have outstanding specialists and return men. It’s going to require a great week of preparation for all of those people that I mentioned.”

On 'if he expects more pressure put on Carr this week':

"I certainly felt like we played a pretty complete game the first time. They're a really difficult cover. They were coming into that game with the number one offense in the NFL, and they were lighting it up. In our game, I think they showed in that second half exactly the type of offense that they're capable of being. I think that the way they played that second half, they really got hot there and were able to get a couple of third-down red-area touchdowns and make that a really tight game. All the way to the very end, they can challenge you in so many different ways, running and passing. They just have a lot of outstanding weapons; [Raiders RB Josh] Jacobs is running the football at such a high level, the three tight ends — [Raiders TE] Darren [Waller] coming back, who's one of the top players in the league, [Raiders TE] Foster Moreau, who we have a lot of respect for, and then you talk about the receiving corps that's really coming together. Obviously, a premium quarterback throwing it. I think they have really found consistency in their offensive line. I think that has been a real strength of theirs here in the second half of the season. They've been playing with the same offensive linemen, and those guys are really getting a feel for one another. They're a really good team. There's a reason why they're 9-7 and playing for a playoff berth because they have an outstanding team in all three phases."

On the difficulty in defeating a divisional opponent twice in one season:

"The familiarity between the two teams always makes the division matchups more unique that way, just because there's that game within the game. Last year, playing Seattle three times in one season, I think you get a real strong sense of that true competition within your division,. When I was in Chicago, that true competition with your division rivals — Green Bay, Minnesota, Detroit — because you know each other so well. I think that having gone through Kansas City and Denver, playing them twice, you realize that second matchup that there is a game within the game that second time. We're certainly going to be ready for Vegas' best because they're playing great. That only adds to the storyline."

On the Raiders' offensive development:

"[Raiders Offensive Coordinator] Greg Olson is an outstanding coach in this league. He was with [Rams Head Coach] Sean McVay, who I was with last year. Greg has been around a lot of outstanding football, coordinated offenses several times throughout the league at a high level. I think that it was a pretty seamless transition going from [former Raiders Head Coach] Jon [Gruden] to him as the primary play-caller. I think that they've been able to evolve as the season has gone on. They've had some attrition with injuries, like all of us. I think he's been able to keep it moving. I definitely feel like he's featuring their offensive line and what they do best. They've had some creative packages for [Raiders QB] Marcus [Mariota] to make sure that they're keeping defenses honest and really giving them a chance to move the football in a lot of different ways. I think that he's done a really good job with that team. Again, they have a lot of really good players and they're very well-coached. That's why they're 9-7, as I mentioned, because of both of those things."

On WR Andre Roberts' impact on the return units:

"A big part of the kicking game, if you guys really pay attention to the All-22 [film] — and let's just say you studied [LB] Nick Neimann and the positions that he's played on the punt team, for instance. He's played a couple if different positions. That's kind of how special teams is, you're trying to get the best combination of players out there and sometimes your job can change, you may be the right wing on punt at one time, then you go to personal protector, then they need you at left tackle. I think, as a young players, you get a feel for those positional changes and what it takes at those different spots. That's how special teams is. Then, you get that feel for your technique, then how teams are playing you. I think that, when you're a young player, all of that is happening rapidly. I think that all those guys that we had some tough lessons at the beginning of the season, like you guys are all aware of, I think those guys just really got more comfortable within their different roles, their fundamentals, our scheme, the scheme on the other side and those matchups every week. I think that we've done a really good job coaching them. Our young guys have really done a good job of improving. Dre, what he's done is he's provided that spark, that that true producer, that that we can look to as an example and that can also help cultivate the culture of our special teams. It helps the guys along the way create more depth within our units. I think that that's what we're trying to do here, so that we can finish the season strong."

On K Dustin Hopkins' impact:

"Dustin's been very consistent since he's gotten here. I would say the same thing about Dustin with his approach. I think that he's been a breath of fresh air. [Hopkins and Roberts] have just been a breath of fresh air for our special teams unit, given that these are veteran players who have lived through a lot, that have played through a lot and that are also producing. I think that that's the one thing about both of these guys; they're both playing well for us. Dustin had an outstanding day last week and his kickoffs had been on-point, both from a depth perspective and a locational perspective. Those guys have just really shown that consistency and performance have been big lifts for us in the second half of the season."

On this game 'being a winner-take-all' matchup:

"The big that you mentioned, that I think is important, is that you have to start in your division. I think that your mindset has to start within your division because you play them twice a season. There are six games devoted right to your division that that matter, right. I think the fact that it's a division game means a lot, but from a big-picture, where this game is and what it means, I think that the more that we're, hopefully, here, that we'll have a lot of these types of games, a lot of big games like this. We've played in a lot of big games like this throughout this season, where it's been a primetime game, the only game in town, against a playoff-caliber team. We've played in games like this, including the first time against this team — that was a Monday night game, a primetime game, against a team that is a playoff-caliber team. What's great about the game is that we have full respect for them. It's going to be a great game because there are going to be a lot of good players to watch. We have full respect for them, for sure."

On the 'expected atmosphere' on Sunday night:

"I haven't played there yet. Some of the other coaches on our staff have, but I know that, from what I understand, is that it's an incredible environment. Listening to some of the TV copies, it's loud — it's a place that gets loud with the dome and all of that. The Raiders fans are one of the best fan bases in the NFL. We're hoping that the entire country is watching this game because these are two really good teams with a lot of good players in it. It's going to be really good for the NFL. We're excited to compete in it, for sure."

On if OLB Joey Bosa's prior comments surrounding Carr 'mean anything this weekend':

"I don't think that they mean anything. I know that Joey has full respect for Derek Carr. These guys talk 10 minutes after a game and he was just taking that we rushed well, we played well as a team. More than that, I thought that it was just being proud of the way that we rushed, and some good things happened for us. I don't think that it's anything personal that way. Our team has full respect for Derek and the type of competitor he is and the type of season that he is having, for sure."

On how 'it seems like this game is going to come down to the last possession':

"Most games between premium teams are that way. I've talked about that extensively. As you guys know, when you play the very best people that you're going to face, it normally ends up that way. We expect it to be that type of ballgame because they're really good. That's why we have to prepare for it."

On how 'it seems like when Bosa gets mad, he tends to play better':

"I'm sure that that's probably a little bit coincidental, but I think you would have to ask Joey more on that. What I want is for Joey to play well all of the time, regardless of the circumstances. I think that, as a competitor, there's always going to be that time where something happens to trigger you, trigger your intensity a little bit. That happens, that's natural, it's part of competition. If that elevates his performance, then I'm glad because that's what great competitors do — when someone elevates that level of intensity, then you respond to it. I think that you have to be willing to go nose-to-nose with that reality. If that's the truth with Joey, then I'm excited about that."

On the 'little things that we don't talk enough about that Bosa does so well':

"He has really good instincts. You've heard me talk about [QB] Justin Herbert's instincts, but Joey has really good instincts as a rusher. He has an outstanding feel for the person blocking him and the feel of the depth of the quarterback, the rhythm and the timing of the play. He has really, really good instincts. He can really see and feel the set and the type of pass that's happening. The big-time rushers that I've been a part of, whether it's A.D. [Rams DT Aaron Donald], [Rams OLB] Von [Miller], [Bears OLB] Khalil [Mack], [Rams OLB] Leonard [Floyd], [Broncos OLB] Bradley [Chubb], some of these guys that are high-level rushers, they just have rare instincts. I think that has really stood out to me about him."

RUNNING BACK JUSTIN JACKSON

On establishing the run game this week:

"It's a huge part of our offense to have a balanced attack so that teams can't just play us in two-high defense with light boxes. That's what we have to take advantage of and I think we've been doing really well the past six games. We just need to continue that same trend. I think the line has been doing a great job. As backs, we've been seeing the flow of the defense, the pockets, and the seams really well. I think it's about continuing that which I have full confidence we will do."

On if this game feels different compared to previous games:

"In a season this long and a playoff race this tight, every game has been so important when you look back on it. We've been in these Thursday, Sunday and Monday night games against very quality opponents like the Steelers, the Raiders or the Chiefs. We've been in these situations. As you said, it's just magnified that much more but it doesn't change your preparation or your mindset. If you don't have that mindset going into every single game, then you're never going to be in this position to be able to have a win-or-go-home game to make the playoffs which is very difficult in the NFL. It's about approaching it with the same level of energy you bring to every single game. You can't start doing something now. You are supposed to have made that habit already as the season has been going along. This game is just an extension of what we've been doing before, and honing in on the details so when those plays happen in the game, your mind and your body are ready for that opportunity."

On QB Justin Herbert in primetime:

"He's a baller. I mean, what else can you say? The dude is an unbelievable player and he heightens his level in those games. I think that's what great players do, so it's awesome having someone like that on your side. It's great to support him in everything we can do, especially as a running back, whether that's protecting him, running the ball, getting out of the backfield as we do a lot here as well or catching the ball for him so he can throw the ball two yards and get 30 or 40 yards on his passing totals."

On G/T Michael Schofield III:

"He's always been a very consistent and good player. I think the second time around, I've seen him elevate his game more which has been awesome for him to step in pretty seamlessly into the line and the culture. For someone like me because I've been around him already, it's nice having that familiar face around and being able to talk about stuff that happened back in 2018, 2019 and just laugh about it. He's been really great for us. He's great in the run game, which I appreciate as a running back. We definitely need him to continue that this week and into the playoffs because he's a huge part of our line."

On contributing to the offense:

"I think it's just continuing every single game to try and get better. With the Houston and Kansas City games, [RB Austin Ekeler] Ek was down during the Houston game, and he was banged up during the Kansas City game so I had to step up. It's just being ready for that moment and opportunity and trying to continue that trend, which I will do. I'm gaining confidence by the day, going out there, playing football and having fun."

On the difference between this season and when the team made the playoffs in 2018:

"It wasn't a win-or-get-in-game in 2018. Obviously, this is a very different team. A lot of the whole locker room is different minus eight to ten guys. Our veteran guys are leaders who are setting that example for the younger guys to make sure that they are ready to go this game. I know we will be. Our younger players have been stepping up all season. At this point, you're not really a younger player. You're just a piece and a part of the team that has a role to fill. I think it's more of getting the attitude and the mentality right during the week when it's most important. Come Sunday night, everybody's going to be ready for that game, mentally. It's about the preparation and the moments before that so you can go out and play free on Sunday."

DEFENSIVE LINEMAN JUSTIN JONES

On the magnitude of Sunday's game:

"I mean, you think about that, but also at the same time we know what's at stake here. We knew what was at stake last week as well, so it's the same type of preparation and same type of mindset going into this game. Every week is a playoff week for us. When it comes to our preparation, we're treating them the same exact way. The guys on our team know the gravity of this game. They know it's easy to win, then you win. You win you're in, if you lose, you're going home. We've known that since last week, it's all the same for us."

On what can be taken from the Week 4 matchup into this game:

"It's mentality — we took the mentality. In that game, we knew it was going to be a fight. We knew we were going to have to play our best game up front to beat those guys. Same mentality this week, up front is where games are going to be won. So we take that and put it on our shoulders and we're going to approach that game and be physical, violent. Everyone's going to be flying around. Everybody is going to communicate and everybody is have a day. I feel like it's going to be in our favor this week — I do feel that way."

"The physicality up front, that is the number one thing I've seen. Guys knew what time it was when we stepped on that field. It was going to be a physical game and we had to win that physical battle for us to win the game. Same thing this week, we have to win that physical battle upfront for us to win this game. The guys in our room, we responded. I was so proud of the way they played. It was an exciting thing to see, really exciting."

On what has led to his success this season:

"[DL] Jerry Tillery, [DL] Linval Joseph, [DL] Joe Gaziano, [DL] Christian Covington, [DL] Breiden Fehoko, [DL] Andrew Brown, [DL] Caraun Reid — everybody. Everybody in our room is the reason why. [Defensive Line] Coach Giff [Smith], [Alex G. Spanos Coaching Fellow John] Timu, [Head] Coach [Brandon] Staley, DJ [S Derwin James Jr.]. My defense is everything, everybody on our defense is balling — I'm balling. That's just what it is, we feed off each other. Going back — I hate to go back to that Texans game — you can definitely see the difference when your family is not at the game, nobody is there to support you. When you're on the road, the only people you have to rely on is your team and the family you came with. So, when they are not there it's kind of hard to really get the job done. Now that everyone's back, you can see the difference. In the run game, special teams, offense — you can see it, you can feel it from the couch. It's contagious."

On Broncos QB Drew Lock's trash talk towards OLB Joey Bosa:

"If you poke a bear, you're going to get mauled. That's what that is. If I was him, I wouldn't have done that."

On Bosa's energy:

"Joey loves a challenge. He loves a challenge from anybody. If anyone challenges him, he's not backing down. That's what I love about him. He's got that fiery energy in him and that's contagious through our whole line through the whole front, through the whole front, [middle] and the back. Everybody feels it. Like I said, when we're all together, it's contagious."

On if there was tension in the previous matchup between Bosa and Raiders QB Derek Carr:

"No. I feel like in that previous game they probably had a lot of distractions going on maybe, or whatever they had going on over there. This game, this week, it's all on the table. You have to bring your best up to beat us because we're bringing ours."

On Carr:

"He's definitely an accurate quarterback. I feel like definitely a field general. He does have command over his offense and he's really vocal out there. His guys respond well to his [leadership] and being able to coach everybody while they are on the field — that's kudos to him. I guess that's what makes him elite, he's just a field general, he does a good job of keeping everybody on the same page."

On the improvement in the run defense:

"It's a mindset and the want to play the run. I feel, like I said, with the energy feel that we bring to the field when we are all together as a unit, it's not a big adjustment for us to play the run. We just have to keep that energy up. Keep the morale up on our team, keep everyone going and everybody on the same page — get hype when we make run plays, get hype for making sacks get hyped for making PBU's. Get hyped for any big play in the game. Show everybody on the team that, 'Hey man, I see you!' That's the biggest thing for us."

On Raiders RB Josh Jacobs:

"He's a heavy runner. He runs hard, very strong. He's pretty fast. He has some good moves, but at the end of the day, stopping the run is a group effort. When you play a guy like that you have to make sure you swarm tackle. You have to make that everybody hitting the pile, knocking it back and making pressure."

On biggest challenge to beating a division rival twice this season:

"I think ourselves. We control our own destiny. We are the only way that can get in the way of our own success. On film, the games that we have lost it's because of the things we didn't do. We didn't follow some of the scheme. Maybe guys weren't running as hard as they could. We got in our own way. Once we get outside of that, we'll be the team to beat — just like we are now, the team to beat."