



Oakland Raiders Transcript

Interim Head Coach Tony Sparano

Opening Statement: "Injuries: David Ausberry did not practice today with the foot; Vincent Brown did not practice with the hamstring; TJ Carrie was full today with the back; Chimdi Chekwa did not practice today with a hamstring; Keith McGill did not practice today with a groin; Marcel Reece was limited today with the quad; Carlos Rogers did not practice with the knee; Justin Tuck was limited today with the knee; Jamize Olawale was limited today with a shoulder; and Kenbrell Thompkins did not practice today and it was for personal reasons."

Q: Will Kenbrell Thompkins be back in time for the game?

Coach Sparano: "I can't answer that question right now."

Q: Is Carlos Rogers injured seriously enough for him to miss the game on Sunday? What is that situation?

Coach Sparano: "We'll see. We'll see how he is tomorrow. Last week, he was really limited during the course of the week as well – I believe last week. We'll see how he is here tomorrow. Obviously, I have concerns because he hasn't practiced in two days. He's a veteran player that knows what to do, so we'd really wait until the last minute there."

Q: Do you have any update on the timeline for David Ausberry?

Coach Sparano: "I don't know, not really at this point in time. I wish I did, but no. I know it's getting better, obviously, but these are hard injuries to put a timetable on. It's getting better, it's just not anywhere near it needs to be right now."

Q: From an offensive line standpoint, as a line coach, you have to prepare your team to play. Is the noise in Seattle extreme?

Coach Sparano: "Yeah, it's pretty noisy. I think of Kansas City, those places like that – they can get pretty noisy and Seattle's is pretty noisy there. We played there a bunch when I was in Dallas. In fact, almost every year it seemed like. Then we played a couple of playoff games up there and it was really noisy there. I've watched games sometimes, I've seen a couple of teams have double-digit false start penalties in that environment. They've got great fans just like we do and they're passionate about their team. It's loud, but we practice that way. It's not something that should be a distraction to us. We shouldn't use it as an excuse, a distraction."

Q: You had been starting to get Thompkins more involved in the offense. Is this a setback for you guys maybe?

Coach Sparano: "I wish I could answer you. In other words, a setback in that him not being out there today? No. As far as what will happen from here in the next day or so, we'll have to see. I'm not sure of that. I'll have a better idea of that in a little while."

Q: Mychal Rivera had a pretty good game on Sunday. What do you need to see from him in order for him to sustain that level of production or involvement?

Coach Sparano: "No, I don't think so. I think a tight end's job is a little bit difficult because of the releases and the different type of release patterns that they could have during the course of the game and how people play them. But Mychal's been pretty consistent that way. Some days the tight end is going to be much more involved than others and it's largely predicated on coverage at times. Mike, in the ballgame the other day, he took advantage of the two-minute situation and obviously, made some plays in the middle of the field early in the game, and made some great catches, which that always helps, too. When you get targeted and you have to make a great catch and you do, all of a sudden you're productive. I think he did that last week. I think Mychal will continue to get better and better. I don't question that about him at all. It's just the tight end position – I can remember answering the same question with a [Cowboys TE] Jason Witten-type player – some days they're going to get fed the ball quite often, and some days they're just not."



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Q: You got Maurice Jones-Drew a little bit more involved last week in terms of carries. Is there any thought of getting Latavius Murray some work, or are you still working with the main two guys?

Coach Sparano: "No, we've thought about it. We've honestly thought about getting all three involved at some point here, especially finally having an opportunity to run as many plays as we ran in the ballgame the other day. It takes something off of everybody. Murray did some good things in preseason, but we do want to feel like we are getting Jones-Drew involved a little bit more that way. I would say there were a lot of factors into why it didn't go his way last week, and when I say that I mean it could be the line, it could be – there's a bunch of factors there. But I wouldn't mind getting all three of them involved there."

Offensive Coordinator Greg Olson

Q: What do you take from last week's offensive reports? Frustrating or do you think you had a chance to get it going at some point?

Coach Olson: "It's frustrating because there were some good things that we did in the football game. The efficiency, the scoring efficiency, we just have to get better at. Point production, more than anything, coming away from that. I thought there were some good things, especially in the first half and in the third quarter there that we did. We have to get more points on the board. Those drives have to lead to scores and have to lead us into the red zone where we can score. I think when you're doing things efficiently, but you're still not scoring points, that's something else that we have to get fixed. That's part of the reason, at the end of the half, I think we were 25 minutes into the first half, why we jumped into a no-huddle mode. I think there were four or five minutes left, and we ended up getting two series there and scored two field goals to kind of get us jump started. We got back into the third quarter and had the good drive going before the fumble. The good thing is, the young quarterback is continuing to progress and get better. We have to get him some wins and he's got to continue to work hard at his craft. He's becoming a good football player."

Q: Fifty-six passes, 22 runs... Is that just the flow of the game?

Coach Olson: "The last five minutes of that first half, we threw it 10 times there. The last two-minute drive was a 16-pass drive, so there is 26 passes there. As you look at it, the 16-pass drive, the very last two-minute drive, usually a two-minute drive doesn't last that many plays. Certainly going back and looking at it, there was a time there at the start of the fourth quarter where you possibly could have. But, I'll say this, we scored the six points before the half in our final drives. All of our points were scored in those situations. We just have to find a way, offensively, where we are running the football to be more productive, in terms of finding some chunk plays within those drives, to get us in scoring position."

Q: Mychal Rivera had a productive game. Coach Sparano was talking about how tight ends' production ebbs and flows throughout the season. Is there something that he needs to do to be more open or more of an option?

Coach Olson: "I just think it's ... With a first-year quarterback, there is still a trust factor. As you see, I think there is great trust right now based on the previous relationships with James [Jones] and Derek [Carr]. They've had a good relationship from knowing each other previously. You can see he has a tremendous amount of trust there in James Jones. I think he's beginning to find trust in other players on the field, Mychal Rivera being one of them. That's also part of that growth process in the passing game with a quarterback and the familiarity with his wide receivers."

Q: So, you don't have a problem with how he's running routes?

Coach Olson: "No, I think Mychal is a young player that is still getting better. A lot of high expectations for him, you try to remember that he's a developing player. He wasn't a ready-made player when he got here. I think last year as a rookie, he got better during the season as a rookie. I think he had a good offseason. By no means right now is he a guy that's anywhere near where he is going to be in this league."



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Defensive Coordinator Jason Tarver

Q: You guys have been pretty good against the run defense lately and really good last week. What's the difference? Is that a mindset thing?

Coach Tarver: "We've gotten better and better at working together. This group of players, I like where they're headed in that they're understanding when they set the edge with extension and those things and that everybody else can play. We had some nice examples of the guys that are activated coming off and knocking the line back and everybody else playing off of that, and that starts with your edge players and our edge players did a pretty good job in that football game. So, we're still looking to improve, we've got some things to improve on, but we're understanding now when we work together, and we play together and we play nasty, within our responsibilities, that we can definitely improve on what has been done and that's what they're starting to put on film."

Q: Did it just click in a way and all come together?

Coach Tarver: "Well, what's happening is we're improving. We've been improving since we put the first four games away on our bye, we've gotten better at a lot of things. Working together is one of them, getting each other on the same page. Playing together. When we're supposed to set an edge, set an edge. We need to improve on our red zone run defense. We can improve there, so that's where our emphasis needs to be. But, we've gotten better at stopping the run, playing together in the run game, playing top down in the pass game and also starting both halves, we've improved there. It's a mindset when you come out after halftime and when you come out to start a game that those are big drives and we've improved there. This is a good challenge for us this week, seeing if we can do that against this caliber of players in offense."

Q: Khalil Mack has as many tackles for loss as J.J. Watt. What does that say about your linebacker?

Coach Tarver: "He's improving every week, and what he does is, from the very start we've talked in here once a week about when he goes fast, when he starts fast on the line of scrimmage, leads with his hands, as powerful as the young man is, he can really knock people around and he's improved and improved and improved. He's not letting formations mess with him anymore. So, we're excited about him there. In the run and the pass game, he's just continued to work and he just needs to stay on this progression. If he stays on this progression, the sky is the limit."

Q: How much difference has it made having Charles Woodson play more in the box these last three games and what does that allow your defense to do?

Coach Tarver: "We've moved – what's great about Charles is this, we've been able to, he can see a call and practice it once or twice and get it right. Both by his athletic ability and his mind. He can focus. That's one of the things that we're working on with our young guys is, 'Hey, you may not be able to play with this guy forever.' This is a Hall of Fame mindset. When you tell him to do something, he learns it and he locks it in and he does it. So, that allows us to move him to create matchups, and he likes it and we like what we're able to do, so he'll continue to move around."

Q: It seems like last year he was playing deep quite a bit. He was playing with Brandian Ross as a younger guy. Has Brandian's improvement allowed you to move him around more?

Coach Tarver: "Well, and we've had, I don't know what a good term is, musical chairs at the safety position, in both years. I don't know if my kids are playing that in class yet, but I like that game, trying to compete to get the chair. But, we've had a lot of guys play there, so that's an advantage for a few things. One, they all learn how to do everything, so then we can move the pieces accordingly, so that's happened. But, 'B-Ross' [Brandian Ross] has definitely improved and what we try to do is keep it simple but still get the matchups to win games, to win those matchup situations. We've improved in some of the situations, some of the third downs, some of the explosive play shot areas and so, we just, our job is to, like you guys have heard from me a bunch, from us a bunch, is to put them in position to make plays. So, by game plan we'll move them around where we need to, but still keep it simple for them."



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Q: When you guys studied Khalil Mack before the draft, did you think he could be that special against the run?

Coach Tarver: "You know, what we really liked is his ability, just as a football player, to really, to be able to do everything. To be able to bend, uncoil, use his hands, play in space, play on the line, and in college they used him in those situations and you got to see a little bit of everything from him. So, what we liked was the all-around football player with the ability to control edges or control what his environment is around the line of scrimmage, or even off the line of scrimmage. So, we really liked the full package, and then as he continues to develop, he'll learn more and more things about how to beat tackles or how to beat backs or how to beat tight ends and his arrow, he's going this way, his arrow is going up, so we like the full football player."

Q: Don't those guys usually have more success pass rushing than against the run early on?

Coach Tarver: "Khalil is so tough, he's very tough mentally and he learns from anything that happens to him, so he's improved quickly in those areas. Like, when a tight end comes over in front of him how he's going to attempt to block him, those things. He's improved so quickly there, but that's what we liked about this young man, is we could see his learning process. He didn't like being wrong, he learns. So, in the run game, it's getting harder and harder to trick him. Sometimes edge players come in and they're exceptional, they're just super quick or they've got the longest arms ever and they just swim guys, or they use their natural ability. He's using both. He's using his ability and also, he's learning, so, we like where he's headed."

Q: Is his mental toughness something you learned about when he got here or is it something you had a sense of before he got here?

Coach Tarver: "He really – you could tell, we could tell, talking to him and watching him that he just really loved football. If you love football then you'll push yourself through things, and we have the best job because of that. It's analytical and it's also physical and football entails all of that, so that toughness is everything. It's the love of the game and you could see that ringing right out of – we saw it all the way across everybody that met with him. We saw it coming through this young man."

Q: He's been getting a lot of pressure on the quarterback, especially the last few weeks. In terms of that translating to sacks, is it just if you keep getting pressure sacks come or is there something else he can do to turn that pressure into sacks?

Coach Tarver: "I would agree with your statement that he keeps getting pressure and learning how to rush in coverage, working together, we've improved some rushing coverage working together. We obviously have to do a great job of rushing coverage working together this week because the young man with the football is very special, moving and throwing, and they have some good skilled players, so we're going to have to be good rush and coverage, but yeah, they'll come. Just keep pressuring the heck out of them, keep making sure everybody knows who we are and where is 52 [Khalil Mack] and that stuff will happen. As long as he's around the ball, we're happy."

Q: What happened on the touchdown pass last week? I think DJ Hayden said that he and Carlos Rogers were switched. Is that true, or what should have happened on that play?

Coach Tarver: "Yeah, they ran a sprint to the field and we're in a position where those two guys are real close together so we can pass that off."

Q: So, they should have switched?

Coach Tarver: "We can pass that off, yes. We can do two different things."

Q: In that instance they should have switched?

Coach Tarver: "For Seattle, when they're looking at it, we have more than one option on that play, yes."

Q: But last week, in that instance against the Browns, they should have switched?

Coach Tarver: "We can switch that off, yes."



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Q: If you don't have Carlos Rogers this week, how do you handle the slot this week? Who do you have?

Coach Tarver: "Well, TJ [Carrie] has played a lot in the slot and we have players that have played in the slot. Neiko [Thorpe]'s played a little bit in there, TJ and some of those, so we'll use different guys in the slot in different situations."

Q: How is DJ Hayden coming along?

Coach Tarver: "DJ has improved, even since he got back on the field. He's a lot, as coach said, as Tony [Sparano] said, he's a lot like a rookie in that he got part of that year and it's almost a year to the day, so if he got part of that year, then you'd be in the middle of your rookie year. So, there's things that he hasn't seen, but he's learning from everything that happens to him, so we like that. He's in good shape and we like that. It's a process, he's right in the middle of a process that every young defensive back, every young corner goes through. Meaning, they're learning routes, they're competing, they're playing through guys' hands. He knocked a couple of good balls away today. He had another route that he'll learn from that we'll go coach. So, he's right in his process, he's right where he should be. He'll play some of the defensive snaps this week and going forward, and we have young defensive backs and we'll use them all."

Q: Is TJ Carrie a little bit ahead of the curve in terms of what he's able to translate from what he's learning?

Coach Tarver: "We think TJ has done a great job and staying in the moment, staying focused in the moment, being able to play a couple of different positions, and punt returner. He's really good with when he gets his hands on the ball. He's been able to get his hands on the ball. He's got forced fumbles, he's got an interception, he's got his punt returns. TJ, again, same thing, he might be slightly ahead of that process, but we like is that he's in his process. He's focused on every play. He goes back and studies these plays on his own. We love that about him."

Q: With Justin Tuck being limited in practice, it seems like his snaps have been down some. If you can't use him on every down, do you have to find places where maybe he would be at his best in certain situations or packages?

Coach Tarver: "We've talked about this before. As many guys that can rush and affect the quarterback as you can have, you'll find ways to use them. So, we're going to continue to roll and you're starting to see as these guys get working together, we've improved, both on our edge play and more pressure on the quarterback has gotten more and more and more consistent, and we need to stay on that. All of our edge players will play and they'll all do it. We'll look for our matchups and we'll talk about it with guys and we try to pick the best matchups and the best situations to use them in."