

A Media Teleconference With:

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON Running Back San Diego Chargers

MODERATOR: LaDainian Tomlinson now has 98 touchdowns scored in 88 career games. The fewest games played to reach 100 touchdowns is 93. That mark is shared by Pro Football Hall of Famer Jim Brown and Emmitt Smith. The Broncos (7-2) and Chargers (7-2) play Sunday night on NBC in Denver with first place in the AFC West at stake.

Q. I know you broke Jim Brown's (14) record last weekend for the most touchdowns in a five-game stretch (15). What does that mean to you to break one of his records?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: For me, it's kind of an unreal situation because when you talk about Jim Brown and what he's meant to not only me but a lot of other guys, it's kind of like a heroic figure that you have in a guy like Jim Brown.

Just to be mentioned and to break his record, I mean, it's just a great accomplishment. It's one of the biggest things that later on in your life you can brag to your kids about.

Q. As much fun as the comeback must have been Sunday in the second half at Cincinnati, do you think given where your defense is -- I mean, do you think that's a formula this team wants to rely on too much down the stretch in November and December and potentially into the playoffs, or do you think once everybody is back on defense, that will be a one-time type of occurrence?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Once everybody is back, we'll get back rolling defensively. That's not too much of our concern. We know when you have great guys out, other guys have got to step in. But at times it's just not the same. Those guys, the star players on our side, they make a lot of plays for you. So once those guys get back, I don't think it'll be too much of a concern.

Q. Do you know enough about this Chargers team to know whether or not this is

maybe the best collection, the best team that you've played on so far in your six years in San Diego?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Yes. I would say it is for the simple fact that all around, the talent that we have on both sides of the ball is phenomenal. You've got guys at a lot of positions that can truly make plays. That hasn't been the case here in the past, since I've been here.

Q. Does it feel like a long time ago when everyone referred to you as the best player on a bad team in this league? That's kind of the arc that your early career took in San Diego.

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Yeah, it seems like it was a while ago. For at least three years now, we have had other guys that can step up to make plays, Antonio Gates, Drew Brees when he was here, even Jamal Williams up front. I think that's a foregone conclusion now. We have a lot of guys that can make plays.

Q. With all the touchdowns you've scored, is there one that stands out above the rest?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Yeah, probably my favorite one is in New England last year, just an eight-yard touchdown run. I think it exemplified the way I run, and I ended up scoring a touchdown. So that one stands out probably the most to me.

Q. Jim Brown is pretty much ancient history to most young players today. How did you come to appreciate him or be aware of him, and can you review your meeting with him after the Browns game, or was it before the game?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, I admire runners because that's what I do and I think there's an art to it. There are no two runners that are alike, pretty much. Every guy has his own style.

So in the course of being a young man, you look at all the different types of runners that have come before you, and some stick out more than others. You know, Jim Brown was obviously a guy that really stuck out, not only because of his size and strength, but the way he was able to move just because he is a big guy. He was able to move in and out of the hole, cutting, and it was just awesome to see him run.

Then just getting a chance to meet him, it was probably the most memorable moment before

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a game that I've ever been a part of. He just said to me I've had a great career so far and continued success. I mentioned to him that I would like to talk to him sometime and keep in contact, and so he agreed. I didn't have much time to talk to him, but the few moments that I spent with him was obviously memorable.

Q. Have you talked to him since?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No, I haven't, not since then.

Q. You just seem to have a nose for the end zone. Is there something special that's enabled you to get in the end zone as many times as you have in as few games as you've played?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: When you get the ball in the red zone, I think you've got to be determined to get in the end zone, whether it's from 20 yards, 30 yards or from two yards. You have to be really determined to get into the end zone because it gets harder. A lot of times teams know what's coming, and the thing that's going to push you over is how bad you want it, your determination to score.

Q. What do you enjoy more, throwing a touchdown pass or scoring one yourself?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I really enjoy throwing a touchdown pass because it's something as a running back you're not supposed to be able to do. It's always neat to find an open guy and kind of read the defense and throw a football for a touchdown.

Q. What about that other passer on your team? Has Phil Rivers' development and the pace of it surprised even his own teammates this season?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No, I don't think so. I don't think anyone is surprised by the way Philip is playing. Philip has been here three years now, and every day we've seen the guy work and we've seen him making all the throws that you want from a quarterback, and then when he took over the spot as a starter, we seen him through off season camps and mini-camp and training camp, and so we've seen something special. We knew that we could continue to keep rolling as an offense.

I think a lot of guys knew that he was going to be good and he wasn't going to take a while to come in and adjust to the speed of the game.

Q. Honest answer, there were no reservations in your mind when you knew that Drew Brees was going to be an ex-Charger and a first-time starting quarterback would be head of a pretty veteran team?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, you don't know how good you're going to be, but you knew you had a chance to be good because for one, we knew that we had a good defense, we knew that we could run the football. The only question was would we be able to throw it successfully?

So obviously when you lose a quarterback, you wonder how good are you going to be. Now, we knew we were going to be good still, but 7-2 after nine games, that's pretty good.

Q. You guys have struggled a little bit lately coming into Denver. Do you have an opinion as to why that is?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No, not really. We just haven't been able to get it going, and I think last year, when we went up 14-3, we were in pretty good shape, and then Champ Bailey has a pick in the end zone and gets them right back in the game, and the whole momentum of the game switches.

So it's been different situations. They have made plays to really get themselves going, and then once their crowd gets behind them, it's really difficult to play there.

Q. From your own personal experience, against Denver, especially here, it hasn't been the same types of numbers you've had against other teams. What do they do against you?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, they take me out of the game. I haven't had the ball much in Denver. They end up taking me out of the game, whether we get behind and we're not running the ball much. That's been the case.

Q. Has it been more disciplined against you in terms of gap control, things like that, in terms of surer tacklers in terms of when you have had the ball?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I'm not sure. I know that one thing they do well is they know us. They know exactly what we like to do, and so they play well against what we do well.

When you play a team twice a year, that's going to tend to happen. And so that's one with the kind of clearance that they have on defense, it's really hard to have success against teams that know you and have great players.

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Q. In terms of -- you talk about the team's success or lack of here, how much does that stick in your craw having been your whole career not winning in Denver?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: You think about it, but it's not something that you focus on and say, 'Man, we just really -- I really want to win in Denver,' and you put everything on the line. It's not like that. You approach this game the same way you approach any other game and you see what happens.

Q. Any special motivation this week being 7-2 going into this one?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: The motivation is for first place. That's motivation in itself. Two teams that are 7-2, playing for the top of their division.

Q. You mentioned that Walter Payton is another influence on you. How did you admire his game or copy it?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: He was the reason why I wanted to play running back, and so seeing him at an early age, I think I was five years old or something, and something about him that I was drawn to. Walter was able to do anything you asked him to do out on the football field. He was able to do it.

So I tried to pattern my game after that the same way, saying that, you know, that's the way you play football. I'm a running back but yet still I can do anything that a coach asks me to do out on the football field.

Q. Were you particularly attracted to the way he blocked or caught the ball or what?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, just the way he played the game. He played the game so unselfish. When he ran the football, you obviously knew how special he was, but even when he blocked, when he caught the football, even seeing him throwing the football, that's what made him such a special player.

Q. You knew that when you were five years old?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Yeah, I knew it when I was five years old that I wanted to play running back, and it was because of him.

Q. Do you remember a particular game that you saw him play?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No, it was a few because back in Texas we used to get some Chicago games. The most memorable moment is

the Super Bowl when they played the New England Patriots. As a kid you're waiting for them to score a touchdown, and when they get close you jump up and down. That's the most memorable game I've seen him play.

Q. Were you as upset that he didn't score a touchdown in that game as he was?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Yeah, of course. As a kid, as your idol, you want him to score a touchdown. It's the Super Bowl, everybody is watching the game, and I definitely wanted him to score a touchdown.

Q. Will anything shy of some playoff success feel empty this year for San Diego?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No question. I think anything less than that, guys start feeling like it was a failure.

Q. You think this year you're (the team) ready to take that step?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Yeah, I think we all feel like that. But again, it's going out and proving it. Thus far, it doesn't mean anything if we don't finish it.

Q. Do you think that the way you lost the Baltimore game, and you know the fallout from that the next week with a lot of renewed cries about Marty Ball, do you think the way you lost that might have actually helped in that it's seemingly sparked an opening of the offense afterwards and perhaps in the long run that will benefit this team?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I think so because when you play in games like that, you realize what you have to do to win against really good teams. You play teams like Baltimore and Denver and teams like that, you have to be well-balanced because teams can stop any particular part of the offense, whether it be the run or the pass, they can stop that. So you've got to be able to be well-balanced.

Q. You seemed a bit frustrated I remember after that game that day, wondering kind of how you outplayed them all day long and still lost that game. Have you noticed a different mentality in the game plan since then?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Yeah, I think we've been a little more open and spreading the ball out and making sure we stay balanced.

Q. Forgive me if you addressed this

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before. In 2001 the Chargers effectively chose to build their future around you instead of Michael Vick. That's looking pretty good right now considering what you've been able to do consistently while Vick has struggled a little bit with consistency in Atlanta. How have you been able to achieve that consistent productivity?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Just try to focus on getting better each year, trying to find something in my game that I need to work on and going after it, and just trying to be a complete player. I think that's what anybody, a coach or anybody else would ask a player – to be a complete player.

Q. Considering the play of Rivers and yourself, do you think the Chargers have any regrets about not being able to get Michael Vick?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I'm not sure. I would think with our success, I don't think so, but you never know. Michael Vick is still one of the most exciting players in the game, and he brings a lot of excitement to a game and to a team, so you just never know.

Q. In essence in 2004 the Chargers turned Eli Manning into Philip Rivers, Shawne Merriman and Nate Kaeding. In retrospect that trade probably wasn't very popular at first, but how would you judge it now three years down the road?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, you've got to realize Eli didn't want to play in San Diego from the beginning, so as an organization, what do you do? You don't want to bring a guy to your team that doesn't want to play for you. So I think it worked out better for us in the long run. I think Philip could end up a better quarterback than Eli. We don't know that for sure yet, but if you look at him right now, both of them are playing great. Philip may be outplaying Eli right now.

Q. What do awards and records mean to you at this stage of your career? Obviously the season touchdown record is out there for you within reach, MVP is a possibility. Do you even think about that, or is that something that's down the road?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: No, it's something that's definitely down the road. The season is so long and you've got to stay focused on each week, and so I really don't have the time to get caught up in thinking about records and all this kind of stuff because it's just too hard.

Q. With touchdowns being the name of the game, what do you think about your chances to maybe leave this game someday as the most productive touchdown maker in NFL history?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: I don't know really what to think about it. It's obviously something that people are going to start to talk about, but again, it's not something I'm going to think about or even talk about because I'm only in my sixth year. I've still got hopefully a lot of years left, and so I think it's too early to even think about it.

Q. This may have been asked before, but why have you guys had so much trouble against the Broncos, particularly at their place?

LaDAINIAN TOMLINSON: Well, when you play Denver in Denver, you have to match their intensity at the beginning of the game because they start so fast and they jump on you and they ride the wave finishing the game, and if you don't match their intensity, then you're going to get behind. Once you get behind, their place is the most difficult place to come back because the defense is so good. You start to try to pass the ball and they rush the passer well, put pressure on the quarterback and they cover well, and it becomes too difficult.

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