

## San Diego Chargers Game Clips – Week 1 at Kansas City (Monday, Sept. 13, 2010)

### **Chargers fall to Chiefs in opener**

By Kevin Acee, UNION-TRIBUNE

September 13, 2010

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — At least it isn't all that surprising anymore when the Chargers find new, shocking ways to flounder in the early part of a season.

They were going to start fast, set the tone early by being physical on defense, running the ball on offense.

For almost the entirety of the first quarter, they seemed on the way to doing all those things, and their defense perhaps ultimately did signal it is on the path to being what it hopes to be.

They spoke afterward of the sloppy field, the positives of fighting at the end and the fact there are 15 games remaining, a reality of which they are adept at taking advantage.

"I don't see this as a slow start," Philip Rivers said. "It's one game out of 16. We can still get off to a fast start. We can still get this thing rolling early."

True, this wasn't so much a slow start as a broken one.

As rain began to fall and lightning flashed all around Arrowhead Stadium, things got muddied.

Whether it was the horrible conditions, a surprising Chiefs team or what has come to be the Chargers' typical September sloppiness, the end wrought a 21-14 opening-game loss.

"We had our opportunities to win the game," linebacker Stephen Cooper said. "All three phases can't play the way we did today."

Indeed.

It was a complete loss – a long touchdown run allowed by the defense, a fumble setting up another touchdown, and a record punt return for yet another

With big plays, the Chiefs literally sprinted to a two-touchdown lead at halftime despite the fact they had not converted a third down in six tries.

The score that put the Chiefs up 21-7 was a 94-yard Dexter McCluster punt return for a touchdown – both the longest-ever such return by the Chiefs and longest ever allowed by the Chargers.

Two would-be tacklers slipped at the start, and then McCluster ran untouched to further a Chiefs lead with 1:43 remaining in the first half.

The Chiefs would end up 1-for-11 on third downs, going three-and-out on half their 12 possessions and totaling just 197 yards.

But one play -- a 56-yard touchdown run by Jamaal Charles -- gave Kansas City more than a quarter of its yards and also tied the game.

On the first Monday Night Football game in Kansas City since 2004 and first anywhere for the Chiefs since 2005, a refurbished Arrowhead stadium made its debut in a raucous manner. What had been a relatively serene place for visitors as the Chiefs struggled to 10 victories in the past three seasons, was loud until a vicious rain and the fact it was 11 p.m. locally at halftime, drove away at least half the announced crowd of 71,297 by halftime.

They missed a Chargers' comeback that was ultimately a dash to defeat, as Rivers' final pass sailed untouched through the end zone on fourth down from the six-yard line with 39 seconds to play.

"On the road, with this environment, this weather, you can't make those mistakes," Rivers said. "You're asking for it to be tough, and it was."

It may have been the rain blowing in circles, or maybe it was that Vincent Jackson wasn't there to catch some of the passes Rivers might have thrown a little better, or a combination of those

things, the Chargers' offense was uncharacteristically horizontal until it had to not be.

A 59-yard touchdown pass to a wide-open Legedu Naanee brought the Chargers to within 21-14 with 2:23 to play in the third quarter.

The defense continued to effectively stonewall the Chiefs, who had just nine first downs on the night and just 70 second-half yards.

After stalling on fourth down at the Chiefs' 32 with 7:09 remaining, the Chargers got another chance with five minutes to go.

The Chargers took over at their 33 with 4:52 to play. Two plays later – after successive 22-yard passes to Buster Davis and Malcom Floyd – they were at the Chiefs' 23.

Naanee made another catch over the middle on fourth-and-3 from the 16, getting down to the 4.

But an incompleteness, two-yard loss by Darren Sproles and two incompleteness ended the Chargers' hopes.

The Chargers took a 7-0 lead with a little less than two minutes remaining in the first quarter, consummating a nine-play, 60-yard drive with Rivers' three-yard pass to Antonio Gates. That followed by three plays a 34-yard gain by Gates.

Gates was double-teamed much of the night but still finished with five catches for 76 yards. Naanee had five catches for 110 yards. Malcom Floyd caught three for 38.

But while Rivers finished 22-for-39 for 298 yards and a 98.0 passer rating, it was not a cohesive night between he and his receivers. There were a number of passes he was a little off, and some that simply went off his receivers' hands.

He took blame, as did his targets.

"It hits your hands, you have to catch it," Floyd said.

The one real defensive breakdown was costly.

After having gone three-and-out on their first two possessions, the Chiefs' tied the game three plays after the Chargers went up 7-0 when Charles burst through a gigantic hole and zigzagged 56 yards for a touchdown.

The teams traded three-and-outs for four more drives (two each) before a Ryan Mathews fumble set the Chiefs up for their second touchdown.

The rookie, who finished with 75 yards on 19 carries, made a nice cut, barreled through two tackles but after gaining 15 yards, Chiefs linebacker Derrick Johnson wrapped one arm around Mathews and with the other dislodged the ball. It bounced once and into the hands of Brandon Flowers, who returned it 23 yards to the 12.

"I've got a lot of stuff to work on," Mathews said. "This game showed me my weakness I need to come back and fix."

The Chiefs scored three plays later on a two-yard pass off a play-action fake that essentially every Chargers defender bit on, as tight end Tony Moeaki was all alone near the back of the end zone.

The Chargers offense continued to stall.

After gaining 106 yards in the first quarter, the Chargers had 21 in the second. After a first quarter in which the Chargers converted four of their five third downs, they were fruitless on four such tries in the second quarter.

After the Chargers' fourth straight three-and-out (not counting the Mathews' fumble on a first down), McCluster returned the fifth of what eventually be eight punts by Scifres to the end zone.

Opening with the late Monday Night Football game for the third time in five years, the Chargers fell to 2-2 under Turner in openers. Even the victories, however, have featured more rough patches than the Chargers would hope for, and even those wins have been followed by struggles.

The Chargers have started 2-3 each of their previous three seasons under Norv Turner. They return home to play Jacksonville on Sunday with the likelihood Qualcomm Stadium will be as empty as it has in at least seven years. Furthermore, a schedule that was perceived to be easy at its start features three straight opponents who won their season openers.

## Again, September looking like cruel month for Bolts

By Nick Canepa, UNION-TRIBUNE

Monday, September 13, 2010

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Wasn't this the site of Ryan Leaf's personal demolition, where he blew up, blew a career and lost it all, here in the September rain? Sure it was. Déjà viewed.

Have the Chargers forgotten their history, only to be doomed to relive it? I don't know what it is about this football team and bad starts, but the market's there and they have it cornered. It's stupid now.

You know the dream. Just about everyone who's ever slept has had it. You're being chased and you try to run, but your legs can't move. The Chargers live out that dream continuously -- in September.

Other than January, when the customary gag reflex sets in, it's their cruelest month.

Monday night (which happened to be Sept. 13), before the downpour and wind came to the Chiefs' remodeled Arrowhead Stadium near the end of the first quarter, the Chargers were moseying along, holding a 7-0 lead on a Chiefs team people in Mozambique know isn't very good.

And then, suddenly, Ryan Leaf flashed before their eyes. I don't know how hard they even tried to shake themselves awake. But there probably was a scream thrown in there somewhere, and it probably was courtesy of head coach

Norv Turner and General Manager A.J. Smith. In stereo.

Arrowhead, which doesn't have a roof, began to bleed Chiefs red. The Chargers tried to move their legs and failed. Worse yet, they often tried to tackle and failed. They tried to pass and failed. They tried to run and failed. They failed at the game of football for about 16 first-half minutes.

And, by the time they semi-recovered, it was too late for their too-little effort. That they fell 21-14 isn't really the story, but how they fell, to a team with a nonexistent passing game (62 net yards) that never scores more than a touchdown if the Chargers' special teams didn't collapse like a soufflé shot full of holes.

The Chargers' first-half effort -- not just their performance, but their effort -- was well beyond pitiful. Knowing this team's history, it's hard to say if it was incompetence or September blahs, but my guess is the former. They were terrible.

You wonder why they had three delay of game penalties. Why would they want to delay this disaster? Arrowhead's a tough place to play, but don't blame crowd noise. Thousands of Chiefs faithful left early for cover.

The run defense had an awful lapse, allowing tailback Jamaal Charles to spring through a gigantic hole for 56 yards to tie it before the first quarter ended. Special teams punt coverage suddenly collapsed. Heralded rookie tailback Ryan Mathews fumbled the ball away after a 15-yard gain that gave the Chiefs the ball on the San Diego 12. Chiefs scored.

Then, after more Chargers offensive ineptitude, K.C. rookie Dexter McCluster returned a Mike Scifres punt 94 yards without being touched for a touchdown. It was the longest punt return in Chiefs history, the longest ever against the Chargers. And this came after another rookie, Javier Arenas, had punt returns of 36 (Scifres saved a TD there) and 24 yards.

Really, now, they can't miss Kassim Osgood that much, can they? I mean, he didn't make every special teams tackle while he was here, did he? No, this was more than Osgood, and celebrated holdouts Marcus McNeill and Vincent Jackson not being around. This was bad ball.

That they would rally basically was inevitable. The Chiefs are too bad. But there wasn't enough there. Rivers seemed to have trouble holding the wet ball all night. Didn't it rain at North Carolina State? A few crucial passes were dropped.

And the game ended on the Chiefs' 6-yard line, with 33 seconds remaining, when Rivers' misfired a throw aimed at Malcom Floyd. They had a first-and-goal from the 4. K.C. was on its heels, ripe near the end. But Rivers never really came close on his three pass attempts there and an ill-advised handoff to Darren Sproles went nowhere.

Mathews was decent, rushing 19 times for 75 yards, but his fumble that eventually led to K.C.'s second score, was a killer. Fumbles are coach-killers, kid. LT rarely, rarely fumbled.

What else is there to say? It was predictable they wouldn't play terribly well here and the weather slowed things down. But nobody could have expected the putrid special teams performance. They looked silly and played sillier against a weak division opponent.

As usual, we don't know what to make of these guys. It's September. They won't give us a chance.

## **Chargers 'moving on,' but in wrong direction**

By Tim Sullivan, UNION-TRIBUNE

Monday, September 13, 2010

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — When the Chargers proclaimed they were "moving on" without their high-profile holdouts, they neglected to identify their direction.

"Moving on," it appears, means moving backward.

In the continuing absence of wideout Vincent Jackson and tackle Marcus McNeill and the conspicuous absence of punt coverage, the Chargers opened their 2010 season Monday night with a resounding and ominous thud.

They dropped a soggy, sloppy 21-14 decision to the Kansas City Chiefs that was, on balance, worse even than the weather.

It included a critical fumble by rookie running back Ryan Mathews in the Chargers' first game without sure-handed LaDainian Tomlinson. It featured a 56-yard touchdown run by Kansas City's Jamaal Charles, a 94-yard punt return score by the Chiefs' Dexter McCluster and a touchdown reception by tight end Tony Moeaki in which Chargers' coverage was so badly blown as to appear non-existent.

Just guessing, but it may be a while before Charger fans are ready to "move on" from this misadventure. Just guessing, but the mob may need to be mollified.

If Dean Spanos and A.J. Smith are unwilling to level that line in the sand and make nice with their holdouts, they can probably count on an avalanche of criticism in coming days.

In fairness, Jackson and McNeill may not have made much difference Monday night. Though he spent most of the evening playing from behind, Chargers' quarterback Philip Rivers was sacked only twice and completed 22 of 39 passes for 298 yards. Still, the idea that the Chargers were playing short-handed is sure to rankle fans following a game that ends on an incomplete pass from the opponents' 6-yard line.

In truth, the seven-point margin might easily have been worse. Were it not for a touchdown-saving tackle by punter Mike Scifres, the Chargers could have allowed as many kick return scores in the first half of their first game as they have in the entirety of any season since 2003.

"We thought that should be a strength for us," Chargers head coach Norv Turner said of his special teams. "... There is a seriousness you have to have and a

focus you have to have. We have good young guys playing on that and (for) some of them it was their first experience. They have to understand that those plays are the most critical plays in football in terms of field position."

Where have you gone, Kassim Osgood? The Chargers' erstwhile special teams star, who left San Diego yearning to catch passes, was last seen scoring the winning touchdown Sunday for the Jacksonville Jaguars.

Maybe Osgood would have caught the pass Legedu Naanee didn't on fourth-and-9 in the fourth quarter. Maybe not. Maybe Osgood would have made some of the numerous special teams tackles that were missed. Maybe not. But the absence of definitive answers does not eliminate the questions or the sense that management may have miscalculated its margin for error.

That the Chargers could not justify providing Osgood the same opportunity he found in Florida can be read as a reflection of the relative talent of the two teams. But it can also be read as another case of the Chargers making a risky choice to "move on" without a Pro Bowl player; as another subtraction by subtraction.

This is the burden Chargers' management assumed in choosing to cut ties with several former stalwarts and in declining to negotiate long-term contracts with two Pro Bowlers still in their prime, Jackson and McNeill. It is a burden Turner took on when he spoke of the Chargers' championship window growing wider on the eve of training camp.

It is a burden bound to grow more burdensome in the wake of Monday's sloppy showing.

Granted, no team can afford to become stagnant. Every team must weigh the effectiveness and salaries of its fading stars against the potential and paychecks of fresher legs.

Looked at on an individual basis, the departures of Tomlinson, Jamal Williams and Antonio Cromartie were easily justified on the basis of diminishing

returns. Judged in the context of his unsettling off-the-field conduct, Vincent Jackson might seem a poor candidate for the security of a long-term contract.

Yet taken in total, it was hard to imagine the Chargers could expect to replace six former Pro Bowl players (Cromartie, Jackson, McNeill, Osgood, Tomlinson and Williams) without experiencing some slippage or, at minimum, some season-opening inconsistency. It was hard to imagine Turner's window having widened.

The danger, of course, is to read too much into an opener; to see September problems as permanent and breakdowns as beyond repair.

Indianapolis and Dallas also lost division games on the road in Week One. These things happen and they are seldom fatal.

But if the Chargers are to move forward, they need to start moving in a different direction.

## Chargers' punt coverage a mess amid a mess

By Chris Jenkins, UNION-TRIBUNE

Monday, September 13, 2010

KANSAS CITY, Mo. — Dexter McCluster, playing his first National Football League game, brought back the punt 94 yards for a second-quarter touchdown that made it 21-7, Kansas City Chiefs. Stunning. The Chargers had never seen anything quite like it.

Not at old Arrowhead Stadium. Not at New Arrowhead. Nowhere.

Nobody has ever brought one back that far against the Chargers. You have to go back 34 years to find the previous long against San Diego, a 92-yarder for touchdown by Rick Upchurch of the Denver Broncos. Since then, the longest had been an 86-yard TD in 1995 by Tamarick Vanover, who also lit up return-coverage teams for the Chiefs.

Consider, before the end of the first half of a game they won 21-14, the Chiefs had amassed 160 yards on two returns

by McCluster and two more by Javier Arenas, the latter of whom also would've had a TD if not for a tackle by overworked punter Mike Scifres. By comparison, the Chiefs only had 127 yards in total offense, 56 of those on one touchdown carry by Jamaal Charles.

"Well, we didn't tackle very well," said Chargers head coach Norv Turner of the special-teams' game. "We didn't spread out. There's a seriousness you have to have (on coverage teams). We've got good young players on that, and for some of them, this was a first experience. They just have things to learn to get better.

"Those are the most critical plays in football in terms of field position. When you have a bad play, you miss a tackle, get out of your lane ... and they've got good returners. That's something we knew from watching the preseason." Brandon Siler, who's been a special-teams regular, seemed to echo Turner's thoughts about the "seriousness" involved.

"It's just as important as offense and defense," said Siler. "You have to be as disciplined as they are in other areas. We've just got to tackle better. We've got to tackle better."

Actually, while there were missed hits on McCluster and Arias, they did a lot of their running in the open field. They got to the corners faster than the Chargers got to theirs.

"It shouldn't have been a surprise, because we knew how good their returners are, what good, hard runners they are," said long snapper David Binn, named a special-team captain Monday morning. "They've got some speed. We expected that.

"I don't know. I know we've had good coverage in the past. Whether we're taking that for granted or not...I don't know. But it's definitely something we have to work on."

Scifres had already unleashed six punts by halftime, and despite the slippery football and rain-soaked footing, he wound up with a 47.8-yard average on eight boots. He had the most solid bring-

down of the night, squaring up Arenas on a 36-yard return.

"Dangerous group they have over there," said Scifres. "They found a crease and hit it. That's not something you want to see, a big hole opening up in front of guys like that."

### New captains

Even before the opening kickoff, there were signs at midfield of the major changes that had come with the Chargers to the 2010 season.

Going out for the coin flip as team captains were quarterback Philip Rivers, tight end Antonio Gates, center Nick Hardwick, linebacker Stephen Cooper, cornerback Quentin Jammer, multi-purpose back Darren Sproles and Binn. The captains were determined by player vote before the team left San Diego for K.C.

Rivers is in his fifth straight year as an offensive captain, but heretofore, he was always joined by seven-time captain LaDainian Tomlinson, now with the New York Jets. Both Gates and Hardwick are first-time captains, as are Sproles, Jammer and Binn, the latter of whom is in his 17th season. Cooper's representing the defense for the second straight year.

In the previous five seasons, a Chargers' special-teams captain was cover-man Kassim Osgood, who's since signed with the Jacksonville Jaguars and will be playing Sunday as a visiting-team player at Qualcomm Stadium.

### Arrowhead II

Perhaps it's like the most expensive of cosmetic surgeries, the extraordinary number of dollars spent to not look too different, to keep the patient appearing pretty much exactly like she or he used to look. If that's what they were going for, the Chiefs and Kansas City got their \$375 million worth in renovations.

The theme on the scoreboard says "The New Arrowhead. New Body. Same Soul." So much of the change indeed seems to have the effect of a facelift, and by many accounts, Arrowhead Stadium's always been one of the better venues in the NFL. Most of the hundreds of millions basically went into upgrades \_

scoreboard, sound system, concourses \_ to improve the fan experience while also giving the team a new office and practice facility on the Arrowhead grounds.

For the record, the renovation was paid for by local tax and a \$125 investment by the Hunt family, which has owned the Chiefs since they were introduced to the world as the Dallas Texans of the old American Football League.

Speaking of which, possibly the most impressive and popular addition is the Hall of Honor that basically could serve as a Hall of Fame for the AFL . Included are memorabilia (jerseys worn by the likes of John Hadl of the Chargers, Daryle Lamonica of the Oakland Raiders and Emerson Boozer of the New York Jets) as well as shrine-like tributes to Chiefs history and all the greats who wore their uniform.

#### Nuts 'n' Bolts

- As if the elements weren't difficult enough on a passing quarterback \_ the word "monsoon" comes to mind \_ Rivers twice had to call timeouts because he couldn't get his orders through to his offensive line and thrice was called for delay of game. After the third, Rivers basically slapped the ball to the turf in anger.

"It's loud, it's wet, it's raining, we're trying to get ourselves situated," said Rivers. "All those things aren't excuses ... We can do a better job at the line of scrimmage. Obviously, it's my responsibility, but we can all do a better job of getting the ball snapped."

- More than 8,000 non-premium tickets remain unsold for the Chargers' home opener Sunday against the Jaguars. To avoid a blackout \_ some the Charers haven't had in 48 straight games, including playoffs \_ all tickets must be sold by 1:15 p.m. Thursday.

- Among those listed as non-players for the game was safety Darrell Stuckey, a high draft choice who was projected as a starter in the base defense at the outset of camp, but had his progress slowed by injury. Stuckey, a native of nearby Kansas City, Kan., starred at the University of Kansas. Also scratched

before the game were linebackers Shawne Merriman and Brandon Lang, defensive lineman Cam Thomas and Vaughn Martin, cornerback Dante Hughes, offensive tackle Adam Terry and third quarterback J.T. O'Sullivan.

- The appearance of the Chiefs on Monday Night Football was their first since 2004.

## Quarter by Quarter

By Chris Jenkins and Jay Posner, UNION-TRIBUNE

### FIRST QUARTER

**Key play:** It was only fitting that a wide-open Antonio Gates scored the opening touchdown of the first quarter, a 3-yard reception in the center of the end zone, because it was the perennial Pro Bowl tight end who was mostly responsible for getting the Chargers so close. Again uncovered for the catch, Gates picked up 34 yards with a Philip Rivers pass to the 5, though he was mostly stopped by a collision with teammate Malcom Floyd.

**Key stat:** Nine. As in, the number of times Ryan Mathews touched the ball in the first quarter of his debut as the new LT, including eight carries for 30 yards and a short pass reception. Although his counterpart, Chiefs tailback Jamaal Charles, picked up 56 in one carry to a touchdown.

**Not in the box score:** They didn't need to spend \$375 million to improve the acoustics in Arrowhead, which was its old deafening self. Forced early on to hurriedly signal a timeout when he couldn't call an audible, Rivers also got penalized for delay of game before the same drive fizzled.

### SECOND QUARTER

Chiefs 21, Chargers 7

**Key play:** For a while, it was a TD-saving tackle by none other than punter Mike Scifres, but that was negated soon after by a Mathews fumble that turned the tide in K.C.'s favor. The ball bounced right to Kansas City cornerback Brandon Carr, who returned it to the Chargers 12.

Three snaps later, Chiefs quarterback Matt Cassel faked the Chargers into the middle and hit a wide-open Tony Moeaki for the go-ahead TD.

**Key stat:** The Chiefs had 160 yards on their first four punt returns, including the longest bring-back in the history of a KC franchise that's been full of special-teams dazzlers. That was the 94-yard TD by rookie sensation Dexter McCluster, who barely had a glove laid on him en route to a two-TD lead for Kansas City.

**Not in the box score:** It could have been even seven points worse for the Chargers. With the hard rain falling steadily, the slippery ball squibbed off Rivers' hands on a snap and bounced off Hester to the ground. With the Chiefs scrambling to recover the loose ball inside the Chargers' 15-yard line, Hester instead rolled over the ball and curled it into his midsection.

### THIRD QUARTER

Chiefs 21, Chargers 14

**Key play:** The Chargers continued their floundering until for some reason, the Chiefs decided to triple-team Gates and zero-team Legedu Naanee on first-and-10 from the San Diego 41. Rivers noticed and threw to Naanee, who strolled in for a 59-yard TD that put the Chargers within seven points with 2:23 left in the period.

**Key stat:** Kansas City had just eight first downs and was outgained 265-175 in the first three quarters.

**Not in the box score:** The Chargers continued to have their problems getting plays off in time, incurring another delay penalty as they lined up for a fourth-and-4 at the Chiefs 36 (which was necessary only because Buster Davis dropped a third-down pass).

### FOURTH QUARTER

**Key play:** With some typically gutsy quarterbacking, Rivers had taken the Chargers from the 10-yard line to the 32, but the drive stalled with a false-start penalty by right offensive tackle Jeromey Clary and died when Rivers' fourth-and-9 pass went through the hands of Legedu

Naanee in first-down territory. And then, in the end, there were three incompletions and an inside handoff to Sproles that lost two yards after the Chargers had a first-and-goal at the 4.

Key stat: For the game, the Chargers had the equivalent of an entire quarter of possession time over the Chiefs. Then again, you don't need the ball in your offensive players' hands for that long when you've got punt-returns doing all their work for them, which is where the Chiefs beat the heavily favored Chargers.

Not in the box score: Even with the Chargers having played such a miserable game, Arrowhead seemed to be filled with a sense of dread throughout the final quarter, as if Chiefs fans were simply conditioned by now to watching opponents (especially San Diego) come in and steal their joy. But not this time. Maybe it really is "New" Arrowhead.

## **Error-prone Bolts upset in opener at Kansas City**

BY SCOTT BAIR – North County Times

Tuesday, September 14, 2010

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- The Chargers have more talent than the Kansas City Chiefs. There's no debating that.

The statistics from Monday night's regular-season opener at Arrowhead Stadium bore that out. The final score did not.

The Chargers dropped a 21-14 decision to an inferior team. The Chiefs didn't win as much the Chargers lost with a number of fatal flaws.

"That's definitely what happened," receiver Malcom Floyd said. "We have talent all over, but we shot ourselves in the foot with a couple huge mistakes."

A 94-yard punt return by Dexter McCluster and a 56-yard run by Jamaal Charles were the decisive blows as the Chargers began the season on the wrong foot. A pair of blown tackles sparked the punt return, and a missed assignment by inside linebacker Stephen Cooper set Charles free and gave the Chiefs a gift-

wrapped victory on a rainy night in Kansas City.

It's hard to say the Chiefs earned it. Not with just more than half the offensive production of the opposition. Not with one third-down conversion in 11 tries. Not with just 62 passing yards. Other than Charles' big run, the Chiefs averaged only 3.1 yards per carry.

That's why the Chargers had a chance to tie it at the end. But, as they had all game long, the Chargers failed to execute. They had four chances to score inside the 10-yard line on the final drive and couldn't do it.

"We gave ourselves a chance, but we couldn't get it done," quarterback Philip Rivers said. "We made too many mistakes that ultimately hurt us. I thought we were going to pull through late, but we fell short. ... This team has a long way to go."

That was evident. The Chargers' special teams had their worst performance in recent memory, giving up three punt returns of 24 yards or more. Rookie Ryan Mathews fumbled at the end of his longest run, setting up a Kansas City touchdown. The offense had three delay-of-game penalties and wasted a pair of timeouts.

Receivers failed to get open consistently and let a few key passes hit the turf. The defense missed key tackles early, and the team dug itself a hole that it could not climb out of.

The Chargers agreed that they didn't play Chargers football.

"Uncharacteristic mistakes will always get you," Cooper said. "Those were things you never saw during last year's 11-game winning streak."

"We have to play smart, disciplined football and we didn't do that. That's why Kansas City won the game tonight."

The Chargers' second touchdown came on a 59-yard touchdown pass from Rivers to Legedu Naanee that was a result of blown coverage by rookie safety Eric Berry.

That seemed to be the spark the Chargers needed to come all the way back. The Chargers pushed deep into Chiefs' territory twice in the fourth quarter, but failed to convert simple plays and complex ones.

The Chargers have started slow yet again, but they see Monday's mistakes as fixable problems that ruined a game, but won't spoil their season.

"We're still a confident group," Chargers coach Norv Turner said. "We fought through some trouble and gave ourselves a chance, but we just didn't convert. Now we'll go back, fix what went wrong and continue to get better."

## **CHARGERS NOTES Bolts vow to correct woeful special teams**

BY SCOTT BAIR – North County Times

Tuesday, September 14, 2010

KANSAS CITY, Mo. -- The Chargers normally take pride in their special teams, but they're unlikely to find anything encouraging when they review the video of Monday's 21-14 loss to the Kansas City Chiefs.

Special teams failures were abundant, and they changed the course of the game. The Chargers allowed three punt returns of at least 24 yards, including a franchise-worst 94-yard return for a touchdown by Dexter McCluster that proved to be the game-deciding score.

Nate Kaeding left kickoffs short and coverage teams failed to capitalize on opportunities to pin Kansas City deep. Return man Darren Sproles didn't have much room to work on the few kicks he chose to return.

All in all, it was a disastrous night on special teams.

"We pride ourselves on special teams, and tonight we let our coaches and our teammates down," fullback Mike Tolbert said. "There are no excuses for what happened tonight. We have to be better. It's as simple as that."

Said coach Norv Turner: "We've been awfully good in those areas, and we'll get back there, but we've clearly got some work to do before that happens."

#### Captains named

Seven players were announced as team captains prior to the game.

Quarterback Philip Rivers, center Nick Hardwick and tight end Antonio Gates were voted offensive captains by their teammates over the weekend. Cornerback Quentin Jammer and inside linebacker Stephen Cooper landed the same honor for the defense, while return man Darren Sproles and long snapper David Binn were voted special teams captains.

#### Low-impact draft class

Running back Ryan Mathews was the only member of the Chargers' 2010 draft class who was active against the Chiefs. Strong safety Darrell Stuckey, who had a lackluster end of training camp, and nose tackle Cam Thomas were inactive for the game.

Of the other members of the draft class, tight end Dedrick Epps and quarterback Jonathan Crompton were cut and linebacker Donald Butler suffered a season-ending Achilles' injury.

#### New Arrowhead still loud

Thunder storms soaked the first game hosted in the newly-renovated Arrowhead Stadium, but the venue was still rocking. The stadium, billed as the loudest in the NFL, lived up to its self-proclaimed title, as the crowd generated enough noise to trouble the Chargers' offense.

That was true until the rain prompted many fans to leave their seats.

The stadium has new luxury suites, bars and amenities and a new big screen on each end of the stadium. The seating is basically the same, with a steep layout that keeps the noise aimed at the field.

## Report card

BY SCOTT BAIR – North County Times

Tuesday, September 14, 2010 12:21 am

#### Quarterbacks: C

Philip Rivers normally owns the Chiefs. Not on this night. He mixed errant throws with uncharacteristically questionable decisions under pressure, an oddity for a player of Rivers' caliber. His passer rating was surprisingly high but, in the end, Rivers had three chances to complete a game-tying, 4-yard touchdown pass and couldn't get it done.

#### Running backs: D

Ryan Mathews' regular-season debut didn't go as planned. He struggled to gain the extra yards that he tallied without trouble in the preseason. His longest run, a 15-yard romp up the middle, ended with a fumble that set up a Kansas City touchdown. Darren Sproles was largely ineffective. Mike Tolbert provided a spark, but his two carries weren't enough to make a difference.

#### Receivers: D

Tight end Antonio Gates had a touchdown and a couple of big plays to keep the Chargers' hopes alive, but none of the receivers proved consistent. Malcom Floyd, the team's No. 1 wideout, didn't make a catch until the third quarter. Other than Gates, the receivers struggled to get open, leaving Rivers with limited options. Legedu Naanee had a 59-yard TD catch that came from blown coverage, not expert route-running. He also had a crucial fourth-down pass bounce off his hands in the fourth quarter.

#### Offensive line: C-minus

Center Nick Hardwick struggled mightily against Kansas City's interior defense. Left tackle Brandyn Dombrowski performed fairly well in his first start in place of holdout Marcus McNeill, but the right side of the line surrendered a sack and allowed a few promising plays to be blown up. The run blocking was average, although the pass protection improved throughout the game.

#### Defensive line: C-minus

Nose tackle Antonio Garay played well early, but the Chiefs opened running lanes at the point of attack. Kansas City backs frequently made it into the second and third levels of the defense, meaning the front line wasn't doing its job well enough.

#### Linebackers: D

At least outside linebacker Shaun Phillips showed up. Besides some quality pass coverage by Kevin Burnett, this group was largely invisible, especially against the run, as the Chiefs averaged 5.2 yards per carry. Too many tackles were made by defensive backs.

#### Secondary: B

The Chiefs were abysmal in the passing game, with only 62 yards. While much of the blame falls on Chiefs quarterback Matt Cassel, the secondary held up well, led by cornerbacks Antoine Cason and Quentin Jammer. The safeties were effective against the run.

#### Special teams: F

If there were a lower letter grade, it would have been given. How about a "W," for the worst special teams performance in recent memory? The Chargers gave up the longest punt return in franchise history (94 yards by Dexter McCluster) and two other returns of 24 yards or more. They lost the field position battle on punts and kickoffs. They couldn't cover kicks and couldn't pin K.C. deep. Darren Sproles called for fair catches on returnable punts. This unit was downright awful.

#### Coaching: F

Norv Turner's team wasn't ready for this game. There were too many dropped passes and too many careless penalties (three delays of game) to ignore. The quality practices that Turner claims his team had last week certainly didn't translate when it mattered most.