

**Washington Football Team Head Coach Ron Rivera
Pittsburgh Steelers vs. Washington Football Team
Heinz Field • December 7, 2020**



What did you tell the team after this one?

I told them it was well earned. We talked about the biggest thing, more so than anything else, is your reputation, your record. When you get on the field, those things don't matter. What matters is who plays the best and I thought our guys played pretty doggone good today.

How does this win rank with some of the other games you've coached, given the situation, down 14-0?

It's up there. Again, in spite of some of the decisions I made today, they played their asses off. This really does rank up there just because of the fact that, who we beat. We beat them in Pittsburgh, the Pittsburgh Steelers. That's one of the storied franchises as well in this league. So, to come in and win, that was big for our guys. I'm real proud of them.

All season long your team has been resilient. They have never quit, especially in the second half. Where does that come from?

Well, that's kind of something that we talked about. We talked about fighting. There's no reason to stop playing. It doesn't matter what the score is. I just think that's who they are. These are a bunch of young guys that are learning how to play, with some veterans sprinkled in there at the right positions and I think that we're growing and we're learning. We got a ways to go, but I'm very proud of the way they played today.

What do you make of the way Alex Smith has not only played over the last few weeks, but obviously everything he's overcome and to deal with another injury out there early in the game? What did you make of his play?

Very proud of him. Again, first of all, this is a heck of a defense we played against today and he took, he was patient and he took what they were giving us and that was probably the biggest thing. I really thought Scotty did a nice job with the play calling in terms of just putting Alex in position to take what they were giving us and we did. We were very patient. Couple times we took a couple shots, but the biggest thing is we were patient and that's the most important thing.

Just curious, what was the mood like in the locker room? If you could describe what it was like after that win in the locker room.

Euphoria. They really are. These guys deserve it. We have been down for such a long time and we're trying to rebuild ourselves and build up. This is something that we can build off of and just really proud of the way they played.

This season you've had a tough time getting the offense going if you didn't have either Terry or Antonio. Against a really good defense today you guys did that. What do you attribute that to?

Just spreading the ball around. If you look at it again, all the guys that were targeted, and that's the important thing is because when you start spreading the ball and stop, and not trying to force it, I think it opens more things up. It opened up a little of the running game at times for us at the right time. We spread it around. Cam started to make some big plays. We started throwing it underneath, whether we were throwing it to Logan or we were throwing it to one of the backs coming out of the back field. When you do that, you give yourself a chance to win because again they can't just focus in on one or two guys.

You guys maybe struggled a little bit defensively at times in the first half but then really cranked it up. What changed? What allowed you guys to pretty much put the clamps on them in the second half?

Well, we didn't give up big plays. If you go back and look at their two scoring drives, they had two really big plays that set it up. And that's something that we can't give up. And again, I'll tell you what, though, they bowed their neck and they saved their coach's ass. I thought we had a chance to run a play and sneak one in and they had a guy make a heck of a play on that fourth down. But the defense bowed their neck and saved me. That's for darn sure.

What did you make of that fourth down play where you stopped them with Casey's tackle?

I just, again, I get it. I mean, the fourth down situations right now, a lot of us are going for it because we know just how important it is to convert, especially when you get into certain positions or certain parts of the field.

What can you say about your defensive line who may not have gotten home much, but they had their hands up all night, just how proud are you of that unit?

Very proud of them. It was one of the things that they were talking about with the coaches, was getting our hands up, getting our hands up, getting our hands up, and he's, I tell you what, Ben's, I mean, him firing the ball the way he did, that's going to be tough to sack him.

When you lose a playmaker early, like Gibson, at the very beginning of the game, I mean, that can be deflating and yet it didn't seem like that really --

I think because we have more than one playmaker. And so, it's deflating, but when you got J.D. McKissic and Peyton Barber, who really are good one-two tandem as well, there's nothing wrong with that.

You got the receivers you got that are making plays, there's nothing wrong with that. And then the tight end steps up and make some big plays. So there was a lot of pluses, a lot of positives in today's game.

Speaking of the big plays from the tight end, Logan Thomas obviously had the one-handed catch, he had the almost touchdown, and then he has the touchdown. Can you sort of speak to the effort that he had in game and as well as Cam's?

Logan just continues to grow. I know Pete Hoener really felt that this was a guy that was on the verge of taking the next step and so when we got him in free agency, it was one of those things that Coach Pete just felt, Hey, here's a guy that we can develop and help him get better, and he sure has and he's fitting in our offense, just doing a heck of a job.

Are you surprised by how effective he is, even just despite what you said?

Well, I think what's interesting is when you go back and you watch his tape, it was, like, gosh, he really doesn't get a lot of opportunities about, but when he's had opportunities, he's done well. So, yeah, it's good to see. To a degree, I'm surprised but, also I'm not because he has the skill set. He's got the size, the speed, the strength. He's got great hands, and he knows the game. He understands the game and that's very important.

Congratulating your guys at the end, is that something you normally would do after a big win or kind of what was going through your mind there?

No, I wanted to. Usually I come in and get my, collect my thoughts, and I wanted to greet everybody as they were coming in. They earned it. They really did. I'm just very proud of what they did today.

A lot of guys made, obviously, key individual plays, but Dustin Hopkins is a guy who is kind of struggled at times this year. What does this say, I think it was 3-3 today about his performance overall?

Last week he was perfect too, so knock on wood it continues. And again, sometimes you get into a little bit of a slump. He worked his way out of it and he's been solid. He really has. And just really happy with what he did, again, working himself through his situation and it was a tough field to kick off of today too.

What did the doctor tell you about Gibson?

What's my thought on Gibson? We'll see what happens. I'm not quite sure. I haven't talked to the trainers about anybody right now, but I'm about to go in and find out what the situation is.

What did you see on the interception with Sweat getting his hands up and making the play there?

Well, just really that was it. We were having a tough time getting to the quarterback, so we tried to get as big a surge as we can, so we get our hands up and into the throwing lane and really that was one of the things that they started talking about doing was just get the surge, get your hands up.

Scoreboard watching yesterday, and you saw the Giants beat Seattle and obviously, you probably understood this was a game you probably had to have to keep pace. I guess the big picture here, NFC East, what's a win like this do going forward with the Giants right there as well?

Well, it's awesome. It's interesting because one of the things that we talked about was taking care of our business and we'll worry about what we need to do as opposed to worrying about everybody else. And that's the thing, we got to continue to focus on us and just work on getting better. So I was real pleased with the way they played.

I asked you earlier this week about what it would take to come into Heinz Field and win here, especially since Washington has never done so and also they've never beaten Mike Tomlinson since he took over as coach. Can you just remark on the historical nature of the win as well here too?

Well, it's big. And I think that something the guys should be proud of. They earned that because this, again, this is a good football team and we're learning, growing, and getting better and better every day, every time we get on the football field. So just happy with it.

Historically, yeah, it kind of gets the, it gets the gorilla off our back. It just shows us that we have the ability to play against good teams, if we play our game, if we focus in on what we're capable of doing.

In 2018, you had that speech at halftime against the Steelers with all access. You said that you needed, you told your team that you needed to challenge them, and that teams like the Steelers try to punch you in the mouth. Did you feel that happening here?

I did. There were a couple things that went on on the field with our guys that they didn't take it. This is a team that comes in and they're physical, their physical play, and they play to intimidate you. And I told our guys, Hey, we got to bow our necks. We got to stand up to them. We just don't take it. And let's match them. That's how you play these good teams. You try to play their game and if you can do it successfully, you have a chance to win and that's what our guys did. They gave themselves a chance.

I know you have a lot of season still to play, but what's happened over the last three weeks culminating in today? As you say, the team has been growing. How gratifying is that for you personally with COVID, with your health struggles, just everything that's gone on to have a win like this today, what you've been building towards? Can you put that into words?

It shows that we have the potential. It shows that we have the kind of players you need to give yourself a chance to win. And I think we have got a good mix going right now. We got to continue to build off it.

Can you take us through the end of the first half. It looked like Alex Smith had some blood on his foot. Did you get a report on that? And then how important that sequence was to get three points before you went into the locker room?

It's interesting, there's a little bit of a stat and this is why people defer. And the stat basically says if you can score going into halftime and score coming out, you increase your opportunities to win by about 70 percent, and we did that. We kicked the field goal and then we turned around and scored a touchdown. So, there was 10 points, two consecutive possessions, and that's huge. That was one of the things -- use timeouts to conserve time just before the half, and we were able to put ourselves in position to kick the field goal and that was big because it gave us some momentum going in. The offense felt pretty good about themselves. Scotty talked to them and said, Hey, this is what we're going to do to get after them, and that was good to see.

You said that we were going to learn something about this team based on how they performed against the Steelers. This is the first win you guys have against a winning team. What you do think people have learned about your football team from this victory?

I think they learned that our guys can be resilient, first of all, which we have seen. Secondly, I think it showed that we can play with teams like Pittsburgh. We have got to be able to make sure we understand that we're capable of it. And I think it tells the other teams that, Hey, we're pretty good. We got some guys that can play and we have got to go out and just do our thing.

I know the question came up about the blood on Alex Smith. Did you get a chance to see that and if you did, what was your reaction to that?

No, I didn't. I haven't talked to the trainer. I'm going to assume he might have gotten stepped on or scratched or something like that and he's probably -- I know he came in at halftime and got it cleaned up, but I didn't talk to anybody about it yet.

Alex Smith

Postgame Press Conference

Washington Football Team - 23, Pittsburgh Steelers - 17.

Q. First question obviously what was up with the bloody foot there at halftime?

ALEX SMITH: Yeah, you get stepped on a bunch as a quarterback and especially that front leg. You get kind of used to it, number to it and really it was the visual when I looked down and obviously the my spat was bloody and could visually see the blood kind of pumping out. So I knew it was a good one, lucked out with the timing, it was right before half so it was kind of tape it up until we got in at halftime and able to kind of take better care of it. So never had one gush like that, new for me, but yeah, thankfully it's not serious at all.

Q. Did you get stitches at halftime?

ALEX SMITH: No stitches at halftime. We were able to kind of clean it and bandaged it up and get back out there.

Q. You guys were struggling there for a little while in the first half. What do you feel really started to get things going for you?

ALEX SMITH: We knew it was going to be a little bit this type of game. They're one of the best defenses in the NFL, I think they lead the NFL in points off turnovers and there were so many teams that I felt like gave up negative plays, turned the ball over, got frustrated and couldn't stay patient.

And for us we talked about all week being able to ride through that. We knew there were going to be some tough patches and be able to take it one play at a time and not get frustrated and not make the mistake that this team's kind of feasted on. I really that drive before half when we were able to kind of finally get some rhythm, get some tempo going, really thought like we had an opportunity, there were a couple plays there I wish I had back, really felt like we could have had seven instead of the field goal but

it was what we needed I felt like to kind of get ourselves going to get the points before half and give us some confidence knowing we were getting the ball coming out for the second half.

Q. Why did you run off the field with the ball at the end of the half there after that sack?

ALEX SMITH: I knew we were going hurry up, field goal, I was pretty upset with myself for taking the sack at that point but I was running off to trying to get that ball off so they could get the K ball on. Because usually that happens very seamlessly with the change over, but from what I understand talking to the refs I think there was a little bit of a problem with the COVID, there's less people on the sidelines, less ball boys and that wasn't as fluid.

So it was not intentional really I was just trying to speed up the process of us getting off and getting the K ball on so they could go kick it.

Q. When they lost Joe Hayden to the concussion you guys took a deep shot and I think it was incomplete and then you hit the one to Sims after that. How much did that change things for you guys?

ALEX SMITH: He's a really, really good player, a heck of a player, and so, yeah, a little bit I think it was that, unfortunately the deep ball didn't work out, they were definitely out of there and obviously another one I wish I would have had back.

But, yeah, he's an elite player in this league, a veteran player, so obviously -- you hate to see something like that happen, like that, but obviously the calls came in and for me to just trying to execute them.

Q. How good was the play of Logan Thomas and Cam Sims to this win? You see the play of Logan Thomas, stretching out lunging, not getting the first down and stuff like that, but how imperative was what they did in this game for this win?

ALEX SMITH: The past few weeks it's been pretty consistent that we have been getting some unscouted and looks to Terry, obviously he's demanding a lot of attention and rightfully so. And, same thing, we have been talking several weeks that obviously if that's going to happen, a lot of opportunity elsewhere. And for all of us staying ready and taking advantage of that opportunity and felt like both those guys did today. Playing really, really tough, tough football and made some clutch plays for us when we needed them.

Q. Why is it that that end of first half start of second half when you score on both ends that have, that that's such a big momentum build for a team?

ALEX SMITH: Yeah, to sneak those points at the end of the half not only was a momentum thing for us coming in at halftime obviously to get the goose egg off the scoreboard, but yeah, it's a steal the possession, to get that possession and know we're going to get points any way possible and know you're getting the ball to start the second half. Obviously more important to get something going, we really didn't start out great to start that half, coming out of halftime, but luckily converting on that third and long and then were able to finish it off.

But it is big, those are huge momentum gains. All of a sudden it goes from 14-0 to 14-10 and it's a completely different ball game. So big momentum changer.

Q. People watching this team, today they watched the team beat the undefeated Pittsburgh Steelers in Heinz Field and I know you don't like looking ahead, necessarily, but what do you feel like people watching this team have learned about it after this three-game winning streak and then again coming into the Steelers' house and winning?

ALEX SMITH: It's not for me to say what anybody else is thinking. For us it's all been about obviously week-to-week you're trying to win every single game, but for us to continue to keep improving and keep growing and I really feel like this team has done that as the season has gone on.

And it doesn't stop, you just got to kind of keep that same mindset going. Luckily, we're still in it at this point, but continue to keep improving and find a way to win a game. You want to be playing your best football come this time of year.

And we knew this was going to be kind of be this brand of football coming up here. Playing Pittsburgh in December we knew it was going to be a little bit ugly.

But proud of our team I think to find a way to win this game like that, especially as young as we are, I think it showed a lot of maturity.

Q. What, for you, is the level of satisfaction at being back at the helm of a team now you're on a three game winning streak and you guys are in the mix for a playoff spot?

ALEX SMITH: Me personally I literally, each and every week, I'm making the most of it, living like it's my last and enjoying that mindset. I'm not looking beyond literally that next start and trying to take advantage of it with everything I got and enjoy it.

I think this entire team, a little bit, from the way we started that season, has kind of got that mentality and I think that's a great mentality to have, just a sense of urgency and living week-to-week and going all in and not looking past that, not getting a held of ourselves. So look forward to kind of keeping that going, obviously a short week this week so quick turn around.

Cam Sims

Postgame Press Conference

Washington Football Team - 23, Pittsburgh Steelers - 17

Q. What was it this week that made you guys feel that you had a chance to knock these guys off?

CAM SIMS: Coach Rivera, he was just putting it in our head that we can do this, like, we just went out there and practiced all week, had great practices, and we just executed today.

Q. Can you run us through those two catches you had, the catch and runs, how big those were? Can you go through both those, what you saw on those plays?

CAM SIMS: I think on the screen, I think somebody, I think the DB had ran out, so when I seen him run out, I knew I had a big play for me. So Alex put it there with a great ball and I had some, I had everybody running out there, so I knew I had a play.

Q. This team was down 14-0. What gave you guys the belief that you could come back again? All season long, it seems like this team has been a second half team. The resiliency, the fight, where does that come from?

CAM SIMS: It comes from ourselves. We know we were down 14 and then we came back at half. We knew we had two more quarters left and it was still a lot of ball left, so we just went out there and executed.

Q. How important was it to get the points right before halftime?

CAM SIMS: That was very important because that's momentum we had going into the locker room. So when we had that going into the locker room, we just came back out with that same energy.

Q. Can you walk us through your one-hander? And have you gotten any sense from looking at your phone or checking Twitter, your teammates, of how big of a catch that was already?

CAM SIMS: Oh, man, I really don't really just pay attention to my phone, like, after stuff like this. But going over the play, I knew, like, it was man. I knew it was man and, because they had three DB's right there across the board, so I was like, all right, let's play for man, so let me get ready for it.

Q. A big Thanksgiving win in Dallas, obviously, national TV, everybody watching tonight undefeated Steelers. What is it about this team that in a big game you guys show up to play?

CAM SIMS: We got a lot of heart. A lot of young guys that's got their fight in them and we got the older guys that are pushing us each and every day. So we just got that fight in us and we ain't going to never let up.

Q. What does it mean to you have these big moments coming your way? You've worked so hard over these last three off-seasons to put yourself in this position to be in a position to make that third and 13 play, to make that one-handed grab. What does it mean to you personally to be somebody that they look for on those big receptions?

CAM SIMS: It means a lot. But first off, I just want to thank the Lord for the big plays. And then I want to thank Coach for trusting me to come my way and Alex to come my way. It means a lot.

Q. They were pretty much taking Terry out of this game, so other people on offense had to step up, you and then Logan Thomas. Talk about just the other guys that had to make plays tonight.

CAM SIMS: We know that going into a game, we know most teams are going to try to take Terry away because he's a great player, man, a phenomenal player, for one, so we know everybody else just got to step up their game, because it feels like they're not respecting us, so we got to do our thing.

Q. You guys are obviously on a nice roll right now, when did you sense at some point during the season that things could this, this could happen, that things were starting to click for you guys?

CAM SIMS: We knew that at the beginning. We knew when coach came we were going to have some chances to do big things. So it was just from the start of the season for real we had to just get right and get everything right, so we just started clicking.

Q. What did you think about wearing the white on white jerseys tonight?

CAM SIMS: Oh, hey, man, sweet. We had to get a W in that white on white. That was a must. But I love them jerseys and the pants, that white on white combination, I love it.