

WASHINGTON

FOOTBALL TEAM, EST. 1932

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QB Alex Smith

On where he feels he is with getting back into practice:

“I think it’d be tough to quantify that right now. There’s multiple moving parts. Obviously, I think – I’ve said this before, I continue to get stronger, even since camp’s started. We had this ramp up period, I know I was on PUP, but even since then I feel like I’ve come a long way. But I still feel like I continue to progress. But you combine that with the fact that I haven’t practiced in two years, almost two years, and also getting comfortable with the orthotic I’m wearing. Obviously the end goal is to get back to being able to play football, but for me just kind of continuing to focus on each day, what I’m trying to get out of each day here for me in the individual period, the ball handling, routes on air, 1-on-1s, getting some 7-on-7 reps, I think making the most of those, treating them as realistic as I can. You know, as I start to view what that next step is and potentially, obviously getting out there on some 11-on-11 drills.”

On when he will feel he is ready to play:

“I think, again, hard to quantify. I think I’ll know. It’s going to be very clear. I think that goes into I guess kind of being comfortable with everything every day. I think I was probably the most comfortable I’ve been out there. Certainly you get jacked up for practice, for me the last couple days and just kind of getting accustomed to it again. It’d be hard for me to put a timetable on that, but like I said I do feel like every single day, today was the best I felt out there for sure. So just continuing to keep stacking them.”

On if it was difficult keeping his personal recovery private:

“Absolutely. I think that in a sense also lends itself to why I kind of finally chose to document it with E:60 in that format in the sense that it was very private. It was really hard for me for a long time. It was something that took several months for me to process. For me to get comfortable with my leg and my new normal took a very long time. I really appreciated that privacy and it was nice to be able to document it in that way, knowing that I was eventually, hopefully going to get to a point where I’m OK with airing it. But, really taking that long view as opposed to kind of having stuff come out in the media. I really appreciated that privacy as I kind of worked through things, and I’m still working through them. That entire time, especially the good first six months after the injury, you build up a lot of walls in your head when you’re in the hospital and you’re wheelchair bound and I’m in a walker. You build up a lot of walls in your head as far as what you’ll ever be able to do again, and then you finally get over that crest and start trying to knock those walls down slowly as they come. And then still doing that, obviously this is the point of view of being out there is still kind of on that track. But going back to the final point, for sure. It took a long time before I could even look at my leg.”

On if he had moments of doubt in himself:

“I’d be lying if I said there wasn’t a lot of, ‘Why me?’ especially in the hospital, you know to wake up. You fall asleep and you kind of wake up and forget it happened and you wake up and it’d kind of hit you the same every day like, this is kind of real and it’s not coming back. There’s no going back. This is what I’ve got moving forward every day for the rest of my life. I definitely think that was early, though. Those emotions were the first few months and it took a while to get over. I think that was part of obviously being comfortable with what, like I said, my life and my new normal is and from there moving forward.”

On if he believes he is the best quarterback in Washington:

“No. I don’t know if I’ve ever thought like that. Certainly you get in competitive situations with other guys and you go and compete your tail off. I think you get to a point – there’s a lot of different ways to play quarterback, and there’s a lot of guys that play it differently. To compare them apples to apples, I think is hard. So for me I think I’ve appreciated different styles of play, the way that guys use their natural abilities to go out there and play the quarterback ability. So for me, no. I think it’s more so about me reaching my potential and that certainly was my entire career, to try to achieve that. Certainly, really it’s no different now. That’s what I keep talking about trying to find my limitations, but certainly you can see potential there, seeing what I can do, what I have left so to speak.”

On why it is important for him to play again:

“I think in the sense, going back to what I said, you naturally build up a ton of walls, wondering what you’ll ever be capable of again, wondering what life will be like. I’ve spent a long time thinking about those things, that inner voice in your head. So for me, ever since I’ve kind of been on the road to recovery, to see what I can do and to knock down those walls. Obviously started with my first step as I kind of re-learned to walk, and progressed from there. I think there’s been a list to that and certainly priorities, and I’ve achieved so many of those. I think, for me though and to a lot of people it may seem kind of counterintuitive, I think as it keeps going, certainly here I’ve played quarterback a long time, this is one of those ones where you wonder if I’ll be able to do again and it’s still sitting out there. When you get closer and closer to it, I think it just fuels it even more. I think it’d be like running a marathon and getting close to the end of the race. I think even more that competitiveness kicks in, and I want to see if I can do it.”

On if he has a benchmark he would like to reach before retirement:

“No. I never approached this game thinking about my individual legacy or anything like that. I think we all signed up to play a team sport and there’s a reason we signed up to play this game. For me it was to go out and be a part of a team and obviously to try to achieve the ultimate goal. That’s it. I honestly haven’t given any thought to anything else. I’m lucky to still be playing at this point. I’m lucky to put that jersey on, the pads on and go out there. I think over the course of my career, it’s certainly something I’ve learned not to take for granted and appreciate it every day. It definitely doesn’t last forever. When it doesn’t, I’ll move on with my life. So, no thoughts on anything like that as far as legacy.”

On what feels comfortable with his footwork so far:

“I feel really good working through progressions, my foot quickness as far as getting back, working through passing progressions, ball handling, a lot of things like that. I think that, you know obviously the next progression is certainly the un-choreographed things. Certainly the time the pocket breaks down, you get pushed back, there’s a thousand and one different scenarios that come up. It’s hard to drill all those things, so I think literally, yeah, getting back to a point when those things happen and it does break down, really do you have what it takes there to obviously save the play, obviously find success, whatever that outcome is. Escape the pocket and things like that.”

On if he’s thought about taking a hit:

“Yeah. I’ve thought about that more than I could probably say. Certainly that’s been in the back of my head this entire process, and that’s something I think through other things that I’ve continued to progress through, it is a progression. It’s not just black and white. I’ve got to go out there and get hit. I’ve got to go down and do it and know that obviously my leg is strong enough to take it. Certainly from a decision standpoint in life, I’m determined to not let that fear determine my decision making. No doubt that that’s there, for me obviously choosing to move past it.”

On if it is important for him to get hit in practice:

“That’s definitely something I’ve thought about as well. I think there’s a progression to that, too. I don’t totally know what that is, but certainly getting out there in a scenario where we do have those jerseys on. And like you said, stuff still happens in situations, people are falling down, they’re at your legs. That’s the reality of playing quarterback. Maybe beyond that, sure. There is a progression where you do try to simulate getting tackled. I haven’t totally gotten there and what it looks like. But that is something I’ve thought about, no doubt. I do think to move past those walls you kind of have to go through it.”

On learning a new system while rehabbing:

“I think you learn how to compartmentalize. When you play long enough, especially as a quarterback you learn how to do that. There was definitely a little familiarity as far as the structure of the system. I spent multiple years in the digit world, so certainly it’s been fun to kind of come back to a lot of that. Obviously when it’s time for me to rehab and get better physically, then my full attention’s there and I think you just attack it that way. Certainly I think the football side has fueled that as well. I’ve really enjoyed – even this offseason, I’ve really enjoyed the virtual learning. It was fun to get back into talking ball, watching film, even from afar. That’s something I definitely think I’ve benefitted from.”

On being around his teammates for his return:

“I’ve been in the building over the last 21 months anyway, so it’s not like all of a sudden I’m back in the building and these guys haven’t seen me in a long time. Certainly we’ve all been away for COVID. But, many of these guys have seen me over the course of this. It’s not like it’s something new. Certainly it’s a ton of fun, I’ve obviously been getting a lot of ribbing the past couple days as I’ve put the pads on and jersey on and gotten back out there. That’s one of the best things about playing this game, is certainly the relationships in that locker room. So, yeah it’s something that’s really special to me. No doubt every relationship is different in the locker room, but I’ve certainly enjoyed that especially in the last couple days.”

On how his arm feels in practice:

“My arm feels great. If anything, I’ve probably got the fresh arm in the sense that I haven’t had the workload these guys have had. I think with that certainly here the next step with getting out there, obviously it’s been nice to throw to moving targets. I’ve had enough spot throwing on PUP. It’s really been nice to throw to these guys, something I haven’t done since I got injured. Even those little things are a ton of fun. Like I said, trying to take advantage of them and make the most.”

On what mental walls he needs to break down:

“I think this is it. This is the big giant one at the end, and to see if I can go back and play quarterback again, something that I’ve done for a long time. Like I said going back, I’m so fortunate to even be here and try to take this on. With that being said though, I’m even more driven to see if I can do it because I’m here and see if I can take advantage of it. But this is it. Certainly there’ll be things that will come up in life that I’ll figure out and work through physically. But certainly to kind of get the green light and to have done a lot physically where I really feel good about everything else.”

On if he thinks about his leg during practice:

“I think that’s what’s been nice about these last several days, is that this progression’s gone on and I really appreciate the way the coaches have handled it and the trainers. But even today, it just felt so much more natural. The first day out there, I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t thinking about it, as far as just how I’d react and if I’d be quick enough or strong enough and things like that. Even just the few days in just how much more natural I’ve felt out there, I wasn’t really thinking about it. I was thinking more about football and playing the game, which has been really, really nice to kind of lose myself in that. I look forward to kind of continuing with that.”

On if he will always wear a brace:

“I will always play with some level of orthotic, some type of AFO. There are degrees, different levels to it, different strengths. That’s something that may change certainly as things change and new things come up. But, I will always wear something.”

On watching games in the suites last season:

“It was very different. I watched several from the coaches box, and then obviously several in the owner’s suite as well. Really different. As a football player, on game day you’re so used to being kind of in it, in the fight down there with your teammates. To be removed from it was such a different aspect, especially on game day to obviously still kind of sense the height of emotion but really not be invested in it with your teammates. Strange feeling. Different aspect watching from afar like that. But, certainly as I was kind of dealing with things throughout my rehab process and still being there on game day. It was different. Obviously I’m enjoying being in this role much more.”

On what specifically he wants to achieve:

“Like I said, I think certainly no doubt there’s an end goal of actually playing at the highest level. But, I’m not getting ahead of myself. I think over the course of this rehab process, for me I’ve done the best when I’ve really focused on the steps and the next step and not really dwelling on something too far down the line. For me the next step is to certainly try to continue thriving in the opportunities I’m given, but obviously getting into a team scenario, getting in on 11-on-11 and seeing if I can play. I think it will reveal itself. We get filmed every single day. We watch film every single day. You toe the line out there. It’s always obvious I think if you can do it out there or not for everybody. I don’t think it’ll be any different for me.”

On how he thinks the style of player will differ in his return:

“[It’s] hard to say and hard to define. Certainly it’ll be a little different, but that’s no different for any aging quarterback in general. Obviously you throw this injury in the midst, obviously I’ve got to see what I can do. Part of that’s going to get figured out. Part of that I figure out every single day, what I can do, what I’m capable of. Certainly there will be some level of adapting.”

On if he has noticed differences in his mechanics:

“I haven’t noticed any differences. It is something I keep my eye on, no doubt, to see if I’m compensating. That’s something I constantly look at no matter what I’m doing, whether it’d be walking or playing football. I try to evaluate if I am compensating or anything like that. So certainly when I’m throwing. I try to keep an eye on it. I don’t feel like I am very much. I feel really strong out there throwing. I haven’t really noticed much of that.”

On the importance of setting an example for his family:

“I think when I became a father, something obviously that changed my life, I think you learn pretty quick that parenting wasn’t always about me telling them things and really more about the example that I give and lead with. I’m faced with this, the injury, the aftermath and the recovery process and how I was going to handle that. I feel like, obviously the older my boys get the more they see. For me [I am] determined to give it everything I’ve got. I’m not going to be ruled by fear. It’s easier to talk about it, but for me trying to be about it and to go about those things the right way. It’s hard to put into words. But a lot going into that. Also I feel like there are so many things I’ve benefitted from. There’s been so much progress made with limb injuries in the past 10 to 15 years. Certainly this is something that if it was even 10 years ago, I probably wouldn’t be able to be out there. A lot of progress has been made that I’ve benefitted from and I really feel like I owe it as well to push the limit for the next person in line.”

On what he learned about himself throughout the recovery process:

“I think that we’re resilient for sure. The human body, the mind, the spirit’s very, very resilient. I had so many doubts on a lot of days that I was sure, certainly, I would never be in this position today. For me, patience was a big thing throughout this process. Certainly I attacked it with rehab and getting back. I put everything I had into it, still am. But certainly some patience throughout the process, giving my body time, my mind time. I think that’s something I’ll definitely take away. It’s hard to know what you’re made of until you get tested with something like this. I think that does go back, it would be impossible for me to turn my back on to see what I’ve got. It’s times like this when you find out, so we’ll see.”

On if he looks at life differently now:

“Absolutely. For me, incredibly lucky is something that jumps out to me to be in this position. Really, really lucky the way things have gone to even be here. Like I said, to be taking this on is amazing. But certainly it’s only because I feel so good about everything else in life, something that obviously is really, really important considering my family and being a husband and a father and the rest of my life. So lucky, I’m definitely grateful and fortunate there have been so many people I’ve had to rely on and benefitted from to be here as well. Obviously starting first and foremost with my wife and kids, but you know the PTs, the doctors, the trainers over the last 21 months that have had an impact on my life and recovery. So I’m incredibly lucky and grateful for all of them.”

On if he has heard from other athletes who have undergone recoveries:

“I think recently, playing with an AFO, I have a drop-foot – about 10-15 years ago that was a death sentence for your career. Certainly I’m not the first, but to have guys go out there and play in an AFO, you see [Cowboys LB] Jaylon Smith go out there and see what he’s done as a young guy. To go see what [Denver Nuggets forward] Michael Porter Jr. is doing right now wearing an AFO. To me, those guys are inspirational to me to see if I can go do this. Going back to how much I’ve benefitted from the progression of medicine and this rehab, certainly for limb injuries and leg injuries, how much I’ve benefitted from all of those people who have come before me. Certainly I do feel like I owe on some level to push this to see how far it can go for whoever may come after.”

On if his leg hurts when he runs:

“No, definitely not pain out there. When I got the rod put in, not to go into too much detail, but they do go through your knee. So certainly there’s some things I’ve worked through. If and when I do get some discomfort, it happens to be up in my knee area, which has nothing to do obviously with my bone. It’s something I think throughout all this that has continued to get better and better and better. Certainly the last few weeks have been the best. With the orthotics, different ones have different advantages and different ones are more comfortable than others, so that’s one of the things I’ve had to deal with. Certainly having a brace in your shoe is something I’ve had to get used to.”

On giving his perspective on the E:60 documentary:

“Going back to the hospital, and even back then was obviously when I was deciding to go forward with documenting this, obviously scary just in the sense where I had no idea where this was going to go, what it was going to look like. At that point, certainly I had a lot of negative thoughts in my head that it wasn’t going to go very far. I think ultimately knowing that it was such a unique situation, and as I did work through it and selfishly kicking myself for not documenting what it was like – certainly as you get removed from things, it’s easier to look back on them. Certainly when you’re in the middle of that, it’s something I appreciate now, having documented it, to have those memories in place what it was like at certain times. I think also just as far as being grateful, even laying there in the hospital bed, I think keeping perspective is important. Even keeping perspective in life with the things that go on in the world, I’m incredibly lucky even in that moment to be lying in a hospital bed even where I was in life with the rest of my family so healthy, the rest of my life ahead of me at that point when things had stabilized. Whatever was left of my leg, it was still obviously in the big picture,

incredibly fortunate and to have people all over the world that would have traded positions with me in the blink of an eye. So, I was just trying to keep that perspective. Certainly, I think that counter-bounced all the moments I had, the 'Why me?' moments as you're feeling sorry for yourself in there. Just for me, trying to counteract that consciously with obviously trying to keep perspective with the bigger picture."