

August 22, 2020

Head Coach Ron Rivera

On his message to players after today's practice:

“Well, we started quickly. We did some good things early, but as practice lingered on it wasn't good enough. That's basically what I told them. I said it wasn't good enough, in all honesty. I did acknowledge I thought the defense had a good day, but my point is we didn't have a good day as a complete team. That is something that we've got to get corrected. If we're not doing it, if part of us isn't doing it, the rest of us has got to bring everybody else along. We have to take ownership of ourselves, and that really was my message.”

On if he is taking more precaution with COVID-19 protocols after his cancer diagnosis:

“No. Again, I appreciate the question, but just so everybody understands we made the statement on my situation and circumstances. I'm fine. I'm going to work through this. As I said, we have a Plan B as you guys have heard. It involves [defensive coordinator] Jack [Del Rio] stepping up. He's been through this before when he was with Coach [John] Fox in Denver. So, we've got a guy who's been a head coach in this situation before. That's what the plan is. I'm not going to talk anymore about Plan B, just so everybody knows. Secondly, just so everybody knows, Plan B will be implemented on the days where I will struggle. Believe me, I'm not being rosy about this, I'm being honest. I'm going to struggle. So those days that I do, I'm going to have to ask the coaches to step up and I'm going to have to ask the players to step up and take ownership. So again, I understand the significance of what I'm going to be going through. I understand how tough it's going to be, but again, those days that I can be on the field I will be on the field and those days that I can't, I won't. And you guys will see it. If I'm there, it's business as usual. If I'm not, it's Plan B. I don't expect that to happen. I hope it doesn't happen. I hope I can make every practice, but just in case I can't we have a plan for that going forward. Like I said before, the prognosis is good so I'm fairly confident. I can't wait to get started and get this thing over with and go forward.”

On focusing on football the last couple days:

“It is very good, it really is. That's one of the things that the doctors talked about was, when I can work, focus. Focus on that because it'll detract from the other things that are going on. A lot of the time that helps get people get through situations and circumstances. My intent is to do everything that I'm supposed to do, follow the doctors very carefully and again, the things that I can do I will do.”

On what he is emphasizing in practice:

“It's about the way we practice and how we do things. Again, we want to practice fast. We want up tempo, so again it becomes second nature. It becomes habit. It helps produce a feel that you know. Today wasn't good enough. Today was not acceptable. If this is what's going to happen, then we're going to struggle. We can't accept it. I can't allow that to happen, so that's why I voiced my feelings today with the players.”

On the quarterback play:

“They all had their moments, they really did. I was pleased with some of the decisions that were made for the most part. That's probably the biggest thing right now, is the decisions that are being made. ‘Are they making the right decisions?’ And then we break it down from there. We talk about, ‘Was that a bad throw?’ Or, ‘Your footwork was poor on that.’ That's the thing that we're trying to get across is, is the quarterback throwing the ball where he needs to throw the ball? Can he make a quicker decision? Was that a late decision? Those are all

the kinds of things that help in the development of a quarterback. Today, they had their moments. But when we got into the two-minute drill, when we got into the move-the-ball portion of practice, I wasn't as happy as I would have liked to have been."

On evaluating the offensive line with missing pieces:

"We have a section of the offensive line you feel very, very comfortable with. It's the other guys that we're mixing in and trying to find out if they fit. That was on exhibition today as far as us coaches. We'll go back and look at the tape. We'll see the good and the bad, we'll see the rotations, we'll see the different combinations of guys, and we'll get a feel for whether or not we feel these guys are going to help us or not. We have an opportunity, I think, to really mix some guys in. A couple guys unfortunately haven't been able to practice. We'd love to see those guys out as soon as they're ready to roll and get them back on the field."

On G Wes Martin:

"Wes is most certainly one of the guys that has an opportunity. He's got a good chance to become part of what we want to do going forward, and he's got to understand that he's got to grasp that reality. He's got to do the extra things he's supposed to, get in [his] book, spend a little bit more time with a coach, work a little bit closer with the center and whoever the potential left tackle will be, get a good feel and understanding for what it takes to be that guy."

On if TE Thaddeus Moss will revert to IR and if so will he be a long-term piece for the team:

"Yes he is. Again, he had foot surgery. He had it a little bit late and it's one of those things that's hindering his ability to go out and work. So, knowing what his potential is, knowing what he did in college football, knowing his skillset, it's like, OK, he's not healthy enough to get out there every day and he would just fall further and further behind. Again, one of the options that we have is the foot is still sore and the foot is still bothering him, is to put him on IR."

On addressing young players like Martin after practice:

"Well again, that's why I did it. I didn't want to make him an example, but I wanted to make it clear we believe enough in him that we're willing to give him this opportunity. That's one of the things we wanted to get across to Wes. We feel that he has the skillset it takes. He played a lot of football last year for a young guy, and he played well. He's got to understand you've got to play well all the time."

On evaluating players when not everyone is on the field:

"The biggest thing more so than anything else is it starts with watching an individual and seeing how he's doing with his techniques and how he's using his skillset. Second, you see how he works with the guys next to him. That really helps tell you about whether a guy will fit or not. We had a young man a few years back that, when you watched him do individual drills, he looked terrible to be honest with you. But, when he got plugged in and played, he looked good and did very well with the center and the tackle and you thought to yourself, 'OK there's something different about this guy when he's in a team or a unit setting.' That's what we're really looking for, to see how a guy meshes with the unit. It doesn't matter which unit of guys he's playing with, if he can communicate with these guys, work in terms of the blocking schemes and the protection schemes, then you feel like you have something there. That's really what we're looking for. It's really what is the guy's skillset like, how does he use the skillset and then how does he work with the guys he's on the field with together."

On having Del Rio on his staff in this situation:

"It's not necessarily just this type of situation, but you know my first stint I didn't have a former NFL head coach on my staff. So, I really didn't have anybody to turn to or anybody to come up and say, 'Hey coach, I'm thinking about this or, hey coach, why don't you try this?' Jack's done that to me already and said, 'Hey we used to do it this way coach, do you think this might help?' And I said, 'You know what, you're right.' So

we've adapted those things. Believe me, I don't know everything. When you have guys that have been there and know the same things you have, they become very helpful. I have a great saying that I really appreciate. It's called 'Don't draw me a map unless you've been there.' Jack's been very helpful, he really has. To have a guy like that on your coaching staff that you can rely on for moments of, 'Hey how did you do this?' Or 'Hey, did you ever do this?' In fact, Jack and I had a conversation the other day about fourth down. It just kind of shows you the importance of having that kind of guy around. Now with the situation and circumstances we have, his value for us is even more so."

On if his diagnosis could be a defining moment for this young team:

"Without a doubt. Because to me, let's say coach has to step back. Are we going to wait for somebody else to step up or are we going to step up ourselves? So, I think this is all part of our growth. I really do. Again, it's going to be a learnable moment and we'll find out a lot more about ourselves."

On his speech to his players after his diagnosis:

"It's probably one of the ones I've thought more about, to be honest with you. Really, just having to do it in the moment that we did it, like I said it was probably one of the things I've had to think about the most."

On the importance of this stretch in training camp:

"I think it's very important because part of what we're doing is not just about seeing how we do things in terms of X's and O's, but there's a callousness about playing this game you have to develop and build. Guys have got to deal with the little bumps, nicks and aches that you get playing physical and pushing each other around. This game is like no other. So the thing that we have to do during these periods, is take advantage of the opportunities to be in pads. This is going to be three padded practice days in a row for us. By the third day, we'll see where our guys are. I know it's going to be tough, but that's the nature of the game. So again, it's an opportunity to build that callousness. We've got to practice smart and we've got to make sure we're learning and getting better each time we step on that field."

On what he wants to see in this three-day stretch:

"The tempo is good all three days. The tempo was good today. But like I said, at the end we started to wane. But you know, we play three-hour football games. For us to start to wane at the two hour and 10-minute mark, that's not good enough. You can't accept that. You want to see that last for three hours. Now, we don't have three-hour practices – typically our practices are about two hours and 15 minutes, but as we go through this and we start getting into those extended practices and, like I said, the two-hour mark we're in the middle of a move-the-ball session and we're dragging our butts, that's not good enough. That's only two hours and 10 minutes. Imagine going into the fourth quarter, reaching the three-hour mark, and we're walking. We can't have that. So again, we've got to continue to work, continue to develop our callousness to playing this game so this becomes our normal. Again the saying goes, learn to be comfortable in your uncomfortable."

On if it is more important to have depth this season:

"Yes. You have to have depth, especially when you're a young team that's developing and growing. Especially when you have young guys in key positions. You look at the wide receiver position, and that's where we have a lot of guys that have an opportunity and they have to step up. They really do. We've got a situation where one of our guys, [WR] Kelvin [Harmon], we've lost him for the year, so we've got to get guys to understand there's a chance. There's an opportunity for them to step up and take advantage of the opportunity. Show us what you can do, separate from the other guys in the group so we notice you when you're on the field."

On bringing in linemen for workouts:

"This works smoothly because we knew how much time we had to have to bring them in, get them tested, get them cleared and then get them on the field. We actually had them workout yesterday. So, we lead up

to that point and then bam, they're on the field for us. I think it will work smoothly, but the key though is you've got to plan and map out for this so if you have any questions on any of your positions, you've got to start thinking ahead of time as to when are we going to invite these in, when are we going to get these guys here so they can get cleared through the protocol, work them out and then decide whether or not to sign them. That's going to be the key going forward. We're going to rely on our pro [personnel] department very heavily as far as that's concerned. So, [Vice President of Player Personnel] Kyle [Smith] and his guys are going to be tested. He and [Director of Pro Personnel] Eric [Stokes] are going to have to work together in terms of mapping out, 'OK we might be going into weeks, we've got a couple nicks here at this position, coach. Going into next week we want to bring in this group of guys.' OK great, and let's go forward with it. Those are the kinds of things that we're going to have to be looking at constantly."

On what he's seen from the secondary:

"Well, I'll tell you what it's a good group. The young guys are doing a nice job. They have stepped up, but so have the veteran guys that we have here as well. You look at [CB Ronald] Darby, you look at [CB] Fabian [Moreau], you look at [CB Kendall] Fuller, you look at [CB Aaron] Colvin and you look at [CB Jimmy] Moreland. Those guys, as five guys go, and you feel pretty strong about it. As far as the young guys and the performances they've had, you feel pretty comfortable going in with corners. One of the things that you do want is you want to be able to have some continuity so in the next few years, you have the same few guys coming in and out of each season. That builds the cohesiveness that you need to be a really good secondary. I like what we've got now in the safety position. I think that these guys are all competing. We've taken an extended look at [S] Troy [Apke], we're looking at [S] Deshazor [Everett], we're looking at [S Sean] Davis, [S Jeremy] Reaves, these guys are guys that are showing what they can potentially do alongside [S Landon] Collins. I think it's a group that you can feel good about saying this is our starting group, but you're also saying 'Wow, I like our depth.' We've got five or six safeties we like. We've got five or six corners, actually six or seven corners. This really is a good group. It's funny because I was talking with Eric Stokes and [assistant defensive backs coach Richard] Rodgers about our secondary here and said this group is better than some of the groups we had in Carolina, especially during our run from 2013 to 2017. So, there's potential for growth and there's potential for us to have a good unit. But again, these guys have to continue to work at it. We can't accept where we are right now."

On what he's learned about himself after his diagnosis:

"Just that, again, for me personally it's another challenge. It's a challenge that I accept, I understand what it is. I'm realistic about it. I've got to continue to be the person that I am and be disciplined about it, go about my business, do things that I need to do, take care of those things. But more importantly, and one of the doctors said it very eloquently, is that 'At some point, coach, you're going to have to be selfish. Take care of you.' So again, I'm realistic about this. I'm trying to be realistic about the approach."