

# WASHINGTON

FOOTBALL TEAM, EST. 1932

INOVA SPORTS PERFORMANCE CENTER - LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA

December 30, 2020

## Head Coach Ron Rivera

### **On what he saw from QB Alex Smith and WR Terry McLaurin in practice today:**

“Just enough to know that they’re still working through their soreness on the side. They’re pretty much with the trainers right now, just trying to work themselves through it. I did get a chance to watch Alex throw some stuff on the side with the other quarterbacks as well. He was alright. He was.”

### **On his decision to release QB Dwayne Haskins Jr.:**

“I just felt it was time to make the move. I just thought I’d take advantage of the opportunity for us both to go in a different direction.”

### **On releasing Haskins Jr.:**

“At the end of the day, guys, I made a decision Monday that I felt was the right decision for us going forward. I made the decision. I informed the owner of my decision. I wanted to make sure he knew. He was supportive. It was just something I felt we had to do. It was something I felt was best for both parties going forward.”

### **On if there is more optimism that Smith will play this week:**

“Yeah, there is. But again, we’re going to be guarded with it. He’ll get some opportunities. We want to see some improvement going forward. Again, if not, we want to make sure [QB] Taylor [Heinicke] is getting as much work as he can right now.”

### **On how his roster decisions help build a new culture:**

“Well, I think the biggest thing more so than anything else is Mr. Snyder being supportive. He understands that there are some things that have to be done. He’s supportive of that. That’s the best part about it. We’ll just continue to make decisions that we feel are in the best interest of the football team going forward. That’s all I can tell you. As we go through it and as we learn more and more about the players and learn more and more about what we’re doing and how we do it, I think that’s the important thing more so than anything else. We’re getting to know this football team better and better. We’re nowhere near where we want to be, obviously. We still have a lot of work to do. We really do. But we have good football players in some key positions going forward. We still have some other positions we’ve got to fill. But we feel very confident and comfortable where we are right now.”

### **On if his decisions will have a long-term effect:**

“I think so. If you look at some of the examples right now—what they did in Miami. I think a lot of people were really wondering what was going on there but look where they are. They’ve done a terrific job there. They really have. You’ve got to look at some other people around the league to see how things are going. Again, you have to be willing to make those moves to start fresh, to start over, to find out what other players can do. That’s the other thing, too. That’s part of why you do these things to see how other guys can play.”

### **On Heinicke having a full week of preparation:**

“Well, the nice thing about it is Taylor’s been in the system before. He understands it. I think that’s why he was able to go out and do some of the things he did on Sunday. I get it, they ran a little bit of a prevent at times. But

Taylor knew what to do. We just feel that giving him an opportunity to do a little more things will help him if he gets the opportunity to be the guy on Sunday.”

**On McLaurin’s game status:**

“We’ll see. Terry did a little work with the trainers on the side. We’ll see how he reacts to it in the morning. That’s the biggest thing I try to explain. When a guy does work, it’s always about how he reacts to it the next day.”

**On how normal or abnormal this week feels:**

“I don’t think anything’s been normal this year, I really don’t. There’s been a lot up in the air. We’ve dealt with them. We’ve tried to keep our heads above water more so than anything else. Everything coming down to this last week, I think it’s really exciting. I’m pretty fired up that we’re in this position and we’ve been able to maintain this position for the last couple weeks. Again, it’s a tribute to who our guys are. They’re very resilient. They play that way, and I think it’s a reflection of the way these guys approach things. That is, they’re trying to keep their focus on football.”

**On players he is leaning on this week to maintain focus:**

“The team. We’ve got a lot of guys that get it. When you listen to them and you watch them, you feel like they understand. They share the message with each other. That’s the biggest thing is that they take care of themselves. They take ownership of this football team and really try to make sure that they’re all focusing on what’s important and not interesting.”

**On if his belief that Smith could play in a game without practice has changed:**

“Nope. It still hasn’t changed. I still believe that veteran players, specific guys like him, are guys that can watch. They can absorb. They get it, and then they can go out and play well. I’m not worried about that.”

**On if he addressed the team about his decision to release Haskins Jr.:**

“No. What I do is I talk to them about, again, what is vital right now. What that is, is preparation and getting ready for this football game. I don’t need to address it because it was out. It got out. Everybody had the news. I think going forward and not covering that—if I had done it on a Wednesday or something, then yeah. But doing it on a Monday when the guys were aware of it, I didn’t think that was something I needed to do.”

**On if Heinicke surprised him against Carolina:**

“Yes. He did. His retention was really good, it really was. Credit to him as a football player. He did some good things, he really did.”

**On why he initially signed Heinicke:**

“Mostly because of the fact that he knew the system and had been in the system, so him picking it up should be pretty good if we had to go to him.”

**On if this team could have still contended for the playoffs if Smith was not in Washington:**

“Well, if we had a healthy [QB] Kyle Allen, I think we could’ve. I really do. I think we could’ve. Part of the reason is because Kyle, he’s very similar to Alex in terms of his abilities. He’s got the same kind of arm. He makes good decisions like Alex does. He’s got good footwork. I think we could’ve been. I do.”

**On his message to the players this week:**

“That’s exactly it. This is a big-time game. I think the biggest thing more so than anything else is our guys have to understand what it takes.”

**On if he has concerns about the emotions of this high-stake game:**

“No, because I thought they handled it pretty well against Pittsburgh and then the Thanksgiving game against Dallas. That, to me, are two really big games that I thought they came out, they played well, they handled the situation and circumstances. I don’t think those moments got too big for them. I really don’t. In both of those games, we were on the national stage. Both of those games were times where there were going to be a lot of people watching them. I thought they handled that very well.”

**On Eagles QB Jalen Hurts:**

“Well, you do see that he’s a good decision maker. He’s got a good arm. They seem to rally around him as a team. He’s got the intangibles you look for as a quarterback. He’s a guy who, coming out, we liked because he’s a veteran, savvy guy. He played a lot of football in college, and he played it successfully. He had some big games that he handled very well. I think he’s a guy that has an opportunity to develop and grow.”

**On similar quarterbacks to Hurts:**

“Well, honestly, he does remind me of [Seahawks QB] Russell Wilson. He really does. I think that bodes well for who he’s going to be as a football player in this league.”

**On Heinicke’s confidence:**

“First of all, that’s who he is. He really is. He’s a very highly competitive guy. The thing you like about who he is, is he’s sharp and he picks things up quickly. When he competes, he takes it really seriously. There’s part of that I think a lot of guys look for is a guy who pushes himself, looks to get better every chance he gets and then, when he gets his opportunity, goes out and does the best he can. I think that’s all you can ask for from football players, and I think his teammates feel that.”

**On what it is like playing in a postseason game:**

“I think the biggest thing is that we’ve kind of had a playoff experience for the last half of the year. We’ve had to win, we’ve had to win, we’ve had to win, and then when we get into a situation where—yeah, if you win, great. Now we’re back in that situation where you have to win. To me, it’s going to be interesting to see how we do handle it. Like I said, there was a stretch where four games in a row we had to win to keep ourselves in it. We did and then we got the lead, and we kind of just floated along. It will be very interesting and important to see how our guys handle this game. Again, one of the things that I’ve told you guys is this is a group of young players. Going forward, to be in this position and having been in this position for a while, you’d hope these moments aren’t too big. I know this, looking ahead to next year, I’m going to be very comfortable with these first-year players that will be second-year players. I’ll sit there and go: ‘Yeah, we’re counting on this guy and this guy, but they played in a lot of big games last year.’ That’s why being in this type of scenario is good for them. Hopefully, you get the win and get into the playoffs, and now they’ve had playoff experience. That’s what you hope for more so than anything else going forward.”