

WASHINGTON

FOOTBALL TEAM, EST. 1932

INOVA SPORTS PERFORMANCE CENTER - LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA

January 1, 2021

Head Coach Ron Rivera

On RB Antonio Gibson and WR Terry McLaurin at practice today:

“We had them working with the trainers. We were just really being smart because we were on the turf today. I wish we could’ve had them out on the field yesterday, but it was pretty encouraging.”

On if he does anything differently to prepare for a big game:

“Not necessarily. I believe I have a feel and understanding for what these games mean, what each of their value is. Obviously, this is about as big as it gets for us. This is the biggest game we’ll play all year, that’s for doggone sure. I’m pretty excited about it. We’ll see how things go.”

On a timeframe for deciding whether Smith can play or not:

“We’ll see. Again, I always tell you, every time a guy has a certain amount of work you always have to wait until the next day. You really can’t tell until the next day. You see how sore he is, if there is any soreness or if something else happened. It’s just the way it is. A player’s health is important. To make a determination today or the first thing tomorrow—you’ve got to be careful with that stuff. You always have to make sure you get a good feel when a guy has gotten a little bit of work.”

On RB Lamar Miller:

“I think he’ll be a contributor. He’s a young man that’s looked good. He had a good day of practice. He’s learning more and more. If we had to have him up, believe me, I would have no issues. He’s a smart, young football player who’s played some good football in his time already.”

On how Smith felt after yesterday’s practice:

“He came out of yesterday feeling pretty good. Again, he had a good day. He took the reps that were assigned for him today in a limited fashion. We’ll see how he is tomorrow.”

On LB Thomas Davis Sr. playing a reserve role this season:

“I thought he’s handled it well. It’s been tough because he wants to play a lot. He’s a very prideful guy. He’s a tremendous football player. He’s had a tremendous career. It’s always tough to go out this way. I feel for him just because I know he wants to play and be out there for the guys. Unfortunately, it’s been tough on him.”

On if he saw improvement from Smith today:

“I thought he had a good day of work today. He moved around well, threw the ball well. Tomorrow will be the indicator.”

On if there are benefits of him being able to coach on the field through his recovery:

“I think sometimes you want to have that ability to jump in and out and be part of it. Sometimes you can reinforce a point a coach is trying to get across to the players. You can reinforce that in an even more of a command tone. Whereas sometimes these guys get familiar with their coaches and they think: ‘Oh, it’s Coach talking. It’s the head coach. Got it.’ It’s an impact that you have as the head coach. So, it’s important, I think for me personally in how I feel to be able to bounce in and out of conversations and drills.”

On watching the backup quarterbacks in their preparation:

“It’s been good. It’s been good to watch everybody work, for that matter. When [QB] Taylor [Heinicke] comes in, he takes those reps. For the most part, there are things we feel he is really good at that would help us. Again, I thought [offensive coordinator] Scott [Turner] did a nice job in terms of scripting to make sure these guys got specific plays at specific times. Today was our situational day. Each guy got opportunities to do something during those periods. I think that is important.”

On what he has learned about C Chase Roullier this year:

“He’s a good football player. That’s probably the biggest thing I’ve learned about who he is. He’s smart. He understands the game. He’s done a nice job for us.”

On if he has a plan for the backup quarterbacks Sunday:

“We will. We’re going to elevate [QB] Steven Montez.”

On why he brought in Heinicke:

“Well, he’d been in the system in two other occasions. Watching him interact in the classroom was always important. It’s why I thought [QB] Kyle Allen was important to us because I watched him interact in the classroom with the other quarterbacks that were there. Taylor did the same thing. You want the right kind of guy that is going to be open, they’re going to work with each other, they’re going to help each other out. You don’t want to leave anybody behind. I just thought that having the right kind of personalities is just as important as is having a guy that’s a good player. Taylor was the right kind of guy for us.”

On a backup quarterback having confidence:

“That’s exactly what you need, especially in that position. At least I believe that. The first reason I believe that is because, first of all, you’re not going to get a lot of reps. You have to have a certain amount of confidence in your abilities. It gives you confidence. You’re comfortable as a coach. That’s what we had for seven seasons with [former Panthers QB] Derek Anderson in Carolina. We had a guy that knew the system that didn’t need reps. When he came in, you felt comfortable enough that we were just going to call our game and we’ll go from there. That’s what we’ve learned about Taylor is that Scott just called his game in the second half with Taylor out there. That’s what you hope for when you have a guy that doesn’t need a lot of reps that you can be comfortable with going in to play.”

On what a backup quarterback having confidence does for his teammates:

“It’s amazing. Again, [DE] Chase [Young] showed you when he went out there and said that to Taylor and Taylor just said: ‘That’s what I do.’ That’s what you want to hear as a player that you know your guy feels good about himself and he’s confident that he can give you a chance to win. That’s all we want is a chance to win.”

On how this team responded to challenges this season:

“Well, I think as I reflect on it, one of the positives was that nobody ran away from the division, so we played for something every week. When we had the most difficult stretch of our season, I thought we responded well. I appreciate the fact that we kept ourselves in every game. Not every game, but mostly every game we kept ourselves within a score and gave ourselves a chance to win. That I think is important that you’re resilient and you’re going to fight till the end. Do I want us to start faster? I most certainly do. Believe me, there are a lot of things I’ve gone through in my mind trying to get that clicked in. Again, this is who we are, and this is the way we do things. I appreciate that. I really do. It’s interesting because I know one of the questions I’ve gotten early on is: what’s the character of this club? What’s the hallmark? Honestly, I couldn’t tell you that other than I think they truly are a resilient bunch.”

On if the players' mentality is reflected in practice:

“I think the thing that has helped us is just the fact that every game has been relevant. Every game has been important, so we play that way, and we prepare that way. Every practice is an opportunity to get better. Every practice is an opportunity to learn. Those things are the mantras that we as coaches continue with our players. It's important that we have a chance to get better and a chance to get focused on us because it's important. I think when there's that prize still in front of you, it keeps that drive to continue to perform and prepare.”

On if he has set goals for the new year:

“Everything is easy [laughs]. I really haven't, to be honest with you. The only thing I kind of thought about was this game and taking it one game at a time, and then we'll go from there. I really haven't. I put a lot of emphasis into how important this game is. I've put a lot of emphasis on us taking care of us, doing our job, knowing our assignments, understanding how to perform. That's the only thing I really talk about, and then we'll go from there. We really, truly will.”

On if missed opportunities from this season will stick with him:

“No. That's all part of the learning process more so than anything else. You learn how to do things and you learn from everything that you've done. I love that old phrase or that new phrase or whatever you want to call it: 'You either win or you learn.' That's my approach to it. We'll either win or we'll learn this year. I just think that if you don't take anything that you've just done, then you've just wasted it whether you win or lose. To me, it's win or learn. I think that's the most important thing.”