

WASHINGTON

FOOTBALL TEAM, EST. 1932

INOVA SPORTS PERFORMANCE CENTER - LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA

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Special Teams Coordinator Nate Kaczor

On how he feels after being on the COVID-19 list:

“I had a little fever for four or five days. Other than that, it felt like a head cold and so I wasn't too bad. I was thankful for that. It was tough not to be with the players and the coaches that you're with all the time, but other than that, it was fine.”

On his confidence level in K Dustin Hopkins:

“So, they're working through the process of three people working together, and if one of them is new, other than the kicker, then the process is different. They're delivering the ball and essence to Hop. So if any one of the holders or the snappers is new, then it's different. And really just the visual cues and what they're looking at throughout the process. Even if there's just a little difference that just takes some time and every time you do something new, for example, a team period, instead of us just being on field three by ourselves, that's new. Then a pre-season game is new, a warm-up is new. So, any new experience has to be worked through, and that's what we're going through this pre-season. So having three talented independently players, putting them together, and the ultimate chemistry situation takes a little bit of time. And I wish it could just take one day, but it's taken some time and it's getting better and better and better. We just have to be able to perform in the new moments. And then once you develop experience together, that's invaluable.”

On helping them get into rhythm as a coach:

“With the timing and the rhythm, it just had to get back to the basics. So basically, when a kicker's looking down at his spot and he's going to see the hand of the holder and wherever the holder puts his other hand, that's not on the spot varies. So when he's looking at the spot, whatever this other hand is doing, there are things in their peripheral vision that they see. Now it's easy for us to sit there and go, ‘well, just focus on this hand,’ but there's other things in your vision. So just getting Dustin to focus on less so he didn't see as much, which is not easy to do was something that he just had to get back to that because of the newness of [LS Camaron Cheeseman] Cheese snapping to [P] Tress [Way]. So really just as a coach, just trying to make it as simple as we possibly can. It's sometimes easier said than done. That's what we had to do. And sometimes when you go back to the ground level and start over, there's some freshness involved in that. So that's what you're trying to build on is just getting back to the basics and narrow the focus and really build from ground zero.”

On CB Troy Apke:

“The thing that he does well, he runs really well. He's a buildup speed. He had a legitimate time coming out of college. He does play fast. He's really a smart football player. He works in his preparation and he's productive. When you pick up the stat sheet after the game and most games he's been involved and he's a kind of a quiet unassuming, just very blue collar, which obviously translate to special teams play. So, I'd say the speed and the technique because he's smart and he prepares really helps him do well. And then just being competitive and around the football. Being productive, that's really just the icing on the cake.”

On developing rookie returners:

“So I'll use an example. [WR] Deandre Carter, who is new, is not a rookie. He's been doing it for a while. So you kind of study it, some strengths that they have that you see on the film, because if you didn't see attributes that you liked on tape you wouldn't bring them here. And then anything that they've had a tough time with or something that they want to get better at, just help them try to improve that and build on what they did. As opposed to [WR] Dax Milne for example, who's a young player that's still developing as a returner. You kind of coach them a little more on what to look at, how to read returns and run. And we do that with a veteran too, but they've been indoctrinated into that a little more. So you're just starting from a little farther away with a rookie, but taking the ball skills and everything that any returner has to have and then just realizing that if someone doesn't quite know how to read a return, teach them where to fix their eyes, to know which way to cut and so forth, and then build off of that. That's what you have to do. So, a returner that's been doing it for a while, helping them with any issues they've had worked through those, get confidence back, whatever it is, and then building the young players up a resume from nothing is a that's the trick with the young ones.”

On the excitement of these younger guys playing special teams:

“Well, I think there's different roles. For example, I thought it was fun to see [RB] Jaret Patterson have a nice kickoff return because he was such a work horse in college. He wasn't doing all the things on special teams that he will for us. So that was fun to see as a guy, you know, because the veterans are like, ‘man, that was a good play.’ And they like it when young players do well too. Some of the other rookies have done it. Dax Milne had a nice punt return at New England. Darrick Forest was unfortunate. He had the injury, but all those guys were tracking to kind of what we thought they would be, which is fun because sometimes you might draft a player and he's a little bit further behind in his development than you thought.”

On how detailed the kicking game process is:

“Well really, it's visual cues and the timing of the visual cues are what's different. So, we've had to make some of our visual cues like looking at Dustin at the spot. I'm ready a little more deliberate than normal as we've built this. So I chuckled because it was necessary to just go back to ground zero and start. When you have guys that have been together there's things that just happen that have been built over time, that you don't need to work on as much. But in essence, when someone, one of the three is having a tough time, then we all have to kind of divide up the pressure, so to speak. And that's what's interesting is there's not very many positions you play where you're totally dependent on three people doing something and with that much precision. A receiver could jump up and catch a one-handed pass. I know the snap or the center snaps into to the quarterback and the quarterback throws it to the receiver. But when we're talking about where the laces are, turning them, it's harder when they have to turn their hands over and they can't catch it like this there's a lot going on there, but that's what we do. So, it can't be any big deal. But point being, dividing up the pressure and going back to ground zero with those visual cues is something that takes time to work through. And the time's over. I mean, we play this week, but it's a process, however long it takes. I wish there was because when one is maybe struggling a little bit, the other two sometimes probably absorb that a little bit and they want to make it better for the other one. So, you're working through some emotions too. That's part of what we do and that's our world. No one's going to feel sorry for us, but that's what we're working through.”

On how you can tell that you have a good group:

“So very good question. As you notice, a lot of our work is cut down into shorter areas, because if we went out and we want to look at eight of our opponent kickoff return schemes and practice for us to run from the 35 to the goal line, like you do on a game or 35 to the 20 full speed, those guys would be done for the day and they couldn't practice on offense or defense. So, us being able to show the looks, they're going to get and a cutdown area so they can see how the kickoff return team sets up and where I would attack their schemes and how I would beat this block. We do it in a short area. So, the only data we have is when we get in games, or the couple of times a week, we do a full cover. And then you can see how guys work through the blocking schemes and get to the football. Really, it's just in the preseason, seeing it happen. And then you may see in the cutdown area,

like, it may be harder for you to see where you're at, but when we're watching the film, you can tell when players recognize schemes quickly, and that's always a good sign, but they still have to go execute it in the game, but just recognize it and recognition of drills. And then anything you saw in the pre-season is really the only way you see it. Other than just little tips that over the years you can tell a player is really picking something up.”

On if punt returning, kick returning and getting a guy more touches:

“Yes. The issue is when you're dealing with touch backs on kickoff return. So, you may play a game against a kicker that's got an 88% touchback percentage and you show up to the stadium and there's a 30 mile an hour wind. Well, guess what? You're now going to return every kick. So that's where people always ask me, ‘man, with all these touchbacks.’ Well, you don't know when those touch backs are going to happen. And if you're just covering the kicks that are miss hits, then the balls on the ground, they're lower hang time. They're harder to cover. But from the return perspective, as you asked, you have to assume you're going to return the kickoff. So, if you're getting some kickoffs that you can return, it gets those guys in a flow. For sure. Now most punts, other than the ones from around the 50 are going to get a chance to return. I would equate it to a running back. The more touches a running back gets and kind of gets in the field and gets hit a few times and carrying the ball and squeezing the ball on contact. The more he runs, I think, yes, you can get into a flow. So a guy that does both would definitely lend itself to that, which is good.”