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Linebackers Coach Steve Russ

On LB Jamin Davis:

“I think he's made a lot of progress. I mean, when you take a look at when we started rookie minicamp, OTAs, throughout fall camp and then even, game to game to game to game. And I know everybody wants to, and I do this to, you want to put something in the microwave, right. Hit the 30 second express button, pull it out and I'm ready to eat and everything's ready to go. And it doesn't work that way. I love to measure progress by you see little things that really there's something might've been giving them a little bit of trouble and then boom, all of a sudden, it's just right. Reads it just right. Those types of things. Love seeing those kinds of little things and him growing in that way. I've seen it, especially when it comes to keying and diagnosing and trusting his keys and responding quickly to what he knows and being able to talk it. And even in the meetings, jazzing it up with, with [LB] Cole [Holcomb] or a safety or whatever. Those are all signs of growth because usually young players, especially if they're talking to their peers, if they're not overly confident. I'm not going to say a lot. If I don't have a lot of knowledge on covering sports and writers and things like that, I'm not about to talk to you guys about it because I'm going to look like a fool. So when you see young players willing and getting excited and getting more comfortable and more confident talking about it, even that's another really good sign of growth. And some of these things people don't see, obviously, and I really think he's headed in the right direction. Very accountable wants to be really, really good, has good work habits. Cole Holcomb's a great role model. Jon Bostic was a great role model for him. So he's seen people do things the NFL way. And I think that that's important for any rookie, regardless of who you are to see how it's done in a professional manner, because of all the time that goes into outside of when we're meeting together, officially, they put a ton of time in very much like quarterbacks on offense with each other, doing a lot of stuff behind the scenes. So I'm very, very pleased with him and I'm proud of what he's doing.”

On his growth and if any plays stand out that he has to grow into:

“Yeah. None of them jumped in mind. I think in general, you see some things where he goes and he runs and he hits. I like to measure growth, not as an absence of issues anymore, it's the time between certain things as longer, or sometimes you have to measure growth where man, he was so close, but he was 10 times closer than he was two weeks ago. You know what I mean? And that's growth and that's positive. And it's very, very important for a coach to point out those things, especially with young men or young people that want to be perfect and want to do things the right way and they can get discouraged. We have a no fear environment in our room. I think mistakes are the old adage. Mistakes are like fertilizer, they stink, but they help stuff grow. It's so true. Sometimes you got to make mistakes to be able to do that. You got to touch that hot stove to be able to move forward, but I don't have a play to, in mind in particular. I guess one of them would be, I think it was, I think Jon ended up getting a sack. It might've been against the Chiefs. It was at home. We did this little third down twist game, whatever. I mean, he did it to a tee and he came around, maybe he didn't get the sack, but in doing what he did opened up one of his teammates to pop right through there and boom, it was down. So I mean little things like that and really what it was, it was how he did it, that set up everything. And, you know, maybe earlier he wouldn't have done it that way. And the line would have been able to pass it off. It's a little bit more obvious, etc. but he's learning those little subtle things to be able to make things happen. I'm very pleased to have a very, long-winded answer to a short question, but I'm pleased with where he's going.”

On how guys have stepped up when Bostic went down:

“Oh, I think they've really done a good job. I mean, you've seen Dave Mayo out there. You've seen Khaleke Hudson out there. Our guys are doing great on special teams. The Mayo's, the Hudson's, Jordan Kunaszyk, Jared Norris before he got dinged up, those guys are playing really, really good special teams. They bring a lot of energy to the room. They're in there studying after hours, just like the starters are because they know that they're one play away from being able to play. You've seen Mayo out there in some different packages. We're just trying to utilize our personnel to the very, very best, that we think to their strengths what do they bring to the table that can help us in certain situations. Jack and the staff and Ron, you know, we've done a good job of that and getting people where they need to be, to be able to help us make plays and play good defense. So I'm really pleased with those guys, young guys like Khaleke Hudson has really grown and matured. He's learning how to play all the spots. I think to be that swiss army knife, I tell him you gotta be bilingual and be able to do that. Cole did it as a young player. Bostic can do it, being able to grow a young man, like that is very, very important for his development too, because the more positions you play, there's subtle differences. You see things differently. And then you have to have a bigger picture view because you can't just memorize each spot. You have to think of things conceptually. And I think for young players, that's fantastic because it gets them outside of a little narrow box and it really opens up their field of vision to be able to grow later on in their career and pay a lot of dividends. And then that way too, you only have so many guys active. It's my job to make sure that if someone needs to fix their helmet or blow out a shoe or whatever that the next guy in is not the next guy at that position, but the next best player, we think that fits what we're doing right now. And that's why you got to build a little bit of redundancy there with it.”

On LB Khaleke Hudson emerging into a starter in the future:

“I think it's one of those deals where you've got a young player that has a lot of different skill sets. You know, he brings a lot to the table. I like to view Khaleke as a Swiss army knife, you know, you can pull out a spoon and a fork and a knife and a scissors and a file. There's a lot of really good things that he can do. And I think he's learning how to. He was truly a Swiss army knife in college, and I mean, they had him at safety, and he's rushing the passer, and he's on a tight end, and then he's off the ball linebacker. They used him in so many roles he's learning and done a really good job of learning how to play truly linebacker. And I think the sky's the limit for Khaleke, we got a lot of faith and confidence in him.

And I love the trajectory that Khaleke is on, and I certainly wouldn't, put him into a box by any stretch of the imagination. I think that he's got a very, very bright future for us, whatever role that we have that we need him to play. But I'm very excited about Khaleke and I know you're not going to find a guy that practices harder or goes out there and prepares. He certainly chomping at the bit for an opportunity as well, we've just got to deploy our pieces the best way that we see it. And we've got some good football players on this defense, there's no doubt about that.”

On helping S Landon Collins play more in the box:

“He's not a linebacker, you know, I mean we deploy a three-safety defense, and those guys are pretty interchangeable and it's pretty exciting. We continue to do neat things with those guys because of their skillsets. And we're always going to deploy our chess pieces so to speak, to maximize those. So really, you know, I talked to Landon and obviously, I talk to everybody. I talked to corners, safeties, D-lineman, because we're all in it together. We're always talking to people, especially when you're a linebacker coach, you're talking about safety. We just talk in passing. I don't coach Landon, I watched Landon play that's for sure and he does a lot of neat things and there's a lot of things linebackers can learn from him. There's a lot of things DB's can learn from them a lot of things that a lot of people can learn from Landon. But you know he's with [Defensive Backs Coach] Chris [Harris] and [Assistant Defensive Backs Coach] Rock and when it comes to coaching guys, we coach our guys that we're responsible for and he's a safety.”

On growth of LB Cole Holcomb:

“It's been fun to see because I watched, obviously, all his plays. I wasn't here during his rookie year, you know, but I watched him in college. It's fun to see a guy that was kind of a hybrid in college then kind of came in here and played a different scheme than we would play a little bit. And then just watching him grow, just being able to do little things like how quickly he keys and diagnose things. It's the same things we're talking about [LB] Jamin [Davis]. And it's good to be able to throw on some clips every now and then of Cole when he was a rookie, or Cole talk about when he was a rookie, so Jamin doesn't always feel like this is uncommon. Its going through, how to key and diagnose certain plays, because even though there's a lot of things from the college game that may transfer over, there's a lot of things that don't. Especially when you start looking at the number of under center plays, you have the motions, the shifts, the slicing, and slicing jets and all the different things that grab your eyes that aren't there so much in college. But to watch young linebackers like that grow into being able to key it, feel it really fast and go where they need to be. Whereas, you know, for instance, when Cole was younger, it wouldn't even be a play action fake and he would just automatically step up, and that's not dogging on Cole. It was just, they're all taught to go, go, go, go. And it was like, oh crap. Now that doesn't happen very often at all. To be able to watch him run the show defensively with the helmet mic, to watch how hard he works in the number of hours that he puts in the questions that he comes up with on a daily basis. Sometimes the thoughts, hey coach, what do you think about doing it this way? That's really really neat because you can see a guy that continues to grow and be a next level thinker. So just his overall development to key and diagnose to being able to use his hands more, that was kind of foreign to him early on. Now he's getting to be more confident, still things that he's working on, but his pad level, his confidence, how he presents himself to the guys in the huddle, what he says between plays. I mean, grabbing guys here, grabbing guys there, It's really neat to see him grow in all of those areas, but I'm proud of him.”

On examples of how LB Cole Holcomb helps the defense:

“It shows up a lot. For instance, today it happened to be a certain third down situation. He kind of took a look at the formation and said, hey guys, alert and he was right on it. Then all of a sudden, just a little bit of an alert or, hey, just be aware of maybe this set up and then all of sudden, boom, he yells it out and we were able to rally to it a little bit quicker. Those types of things are really next level stuff. Being able to do kind of play ahead of the play by saying, okay, this is the situation, this is the formation, this is the play. Really all the data that he has to be able to process and can process is pretty neat. Being able to make certain calls, you're there, let's put these guys here, be able to take information from [Defensive Coordinator] Jack [Del Rio] through the headset really quickly and concisely. Being able to tell people what Jack wants to get quickly relayed before the play starts. I mean, it's pretty extensive and it's pretty often that that shows up in a positive way.”

On what he has seen from LB Cole Holcomb regarding consistency:

“It's grown. In the bi-week, we obviously go through everything in the bi-week and I really felt, we try to break things up in quarters and you analyze it and you're looking at all the data and you're looking at these types of things. And I really thought the growth he made from the first quarter of the season so to speak to the, I know we can't talk in quarters anymore he's got the extra game, but to the second quarter of the season, boy, you really saw a crispness and a sharpness. More consistency that you were saying that he was talking about. You just saw it be more consistent each and every game. I think, you know, when it comes to being on the details and then the comfortability of being able to run the show and those types of things. Because there is a little bit of a growth that comes with having to make the calls and cause invariably. Somebody doesn't hear it and as loud as it was to call and you know, you're trying to focus on your job and you're still trying to make sure everybody knows what's going on. And there's certain level of comfort that has to be developed in doing that and I've seen that grow as well.”

On what S Landon Collins does well in the box:

“I think Landon does a lot of stuff. Well, first of all, he can give you a lot of multiplicity where he can look like he's in one spot but doesn't have to be there. Your linebackers are usually where your linebackers are and Landon can do a lot of stuff where I'm over here, here I am and then all of a sudden, now I'm not, and I'm not going to get talking to scheme and things like that, but he gives you a lot of multiplicity. I mean, he's very decisive. He's strong, he's physical, he's instinctive. He can blitz as well, all those types of things and when you've got to an athlete like that, that can do all the things that you need to do, we're going to use them every chance we get and every way we can think of. So it's fun. I think he's having a lot of fun with it too. Not to speak for Landon. I enjoy watching him play.”