

# WASHINGTON

## FOOTBALL TEAM, EST. 1932

INOVA SPORTS PERFORMANCE CENTER - LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA

November 24, 2021

### Head Coach Ron Rivera

#### **On TE Logan Thomas and WR Curtis Samuel:**

“They both looked pretty good. If we were going to list them, we'd listed them as limited. But for the most part, they both participated in individual, and they both participated in some of the groups stuff. We had a set number of reps that we stuck to for each guy, and we'll see how they are tomorrow. From what early indications was that they practiced pretty well.”

#### **On DT Jonathan Allen:**

“I think a little bit of both. I think he's doing some things even better than he did last year. He's getting a little bit better feel for what we're asking as far as the techniques and the styles we want him to use. But at the same time, it's just him doing the things that he does well. He has gotten great vertical push. He's able to get off the blocker in time. He puts himself in position to affect the quarterback in the middle. He's playing very well. And like you said, because he's getting the sacks, he is getting the attention that he deserves.”

#### **On giving up fewer downfield plays on defense:**

“Well, I think we talked about it earlier, about the fact that it looks like the rush and the coverage in sync a little bit better. You see good communication between the secondary back there. Those guys have a better feel for one another. I really believe that that's a big part of it is that they're working together as a group. Early on, they were learning each other. I think now they're a lot more comfortable out there. The communication has been big and, again, we've been able to keep it in front of us.”

#### **On the offensive line play:**

“Well, I think a lot of it has to do with the way they work. They've got tremendous work ethic. As a group, they're a very close-knit group. I really do appreciate the coaching that those guys get as well. Not that all the other positions aren't being coached as well. It's just the offensive line is a completely different mentality. It's a different way of thinking. One thing I gotta give credit to, obviously, is our personnel. We had the same thing last year. We made a conscientious effort of trying to keep at least, 12, 13, 14, 15 guys around. We may have had nine or 10 on active, but we had somewhere around four or five or six guys on practice squad at a time. I think right now we're at 15 total offense linemen. I think right now we have nine on active and six on practice. I think that's what the number is. I might be a little wrong on that, but that's one thing we've done consciously. So it's a good group of guys. There's a lot of guys that are getting practice reps. A lot of guys that are getting reps on the side post practice right now. I know [Assistant Offensive Line] Coach Wharton has that young group of guys going through some little extra walkthrough stuff. For that group, just the way they do things has been really good. But I think, again, credit goes to the personnel. Last year was the same thing.”

#### **On the wildcard spot:**

“What I'm talking about is putting ourselves in position. We take it one at a time. Each time we get an opportunity to put ourselves in better position to when we can get to December, we can get to that time in December where you sit there and say, ‘Hey, now's our opportunity.’ I know talking to you guys, I talk about it because I know the players will hear it. But if we can put ourselves in position to get to December where we have five divisional games left, who knows. Nobody will know. We have to take care of our business. First and foremost, we got to take them one at a time.”

**On TE John Bates:**

“John's a very bright young man, smart football player, understands the game well. He's one of those guys that's going to look better I think as the action goes. You see him think a lot in practice and he makes mistakes and sometimes his technique isn't as good as it needs to be, but then you watch it on tape, you put it on tape and you see him excel as a blocker and doing those things. As far as a route runner, he has a little bit of a knack for finding that crease in the zone and making himself available. He presents a good target for the quarterback, and he can use his body to shield the ball. He does that very well. For that matter, I thought Sammis [Reyes] did some really good things blocking. He was very physical at the point of attack. What's interesting, a couple of times he was wide open and it'd be kind of interesting to see what happens if they throw the ball to him. So we'll see.”

**On Bates' pass catching ability:**

“For moments like that, especially as a receiver, it's understanding first of all, what the leverage potentially could be. If you know there's a defender matching you close to the right side, the quarterback is going to want to throw the ball to your left. So you try to make sure that you're in position so that your body is between the ball and the defender. And again, you just understand if that guy's on my outside, I know that when I present, I want to present to where I'm away from it. And he does that. He does that pretty well. You see him when he works on things here in practice. It's not always pretty, but you know he's trying to do those things.”

**On how often you see rookies understand getting that leverage:**

“It's interesting because not everybody gets that. A lot of guys come and they kind of want to present it here. One of the neat things that I talked about it during training camp was listening to Fitz [QB Ryan Fitzpatrick] talk to the young receivers and tell them: ‘Hey, look, if I see the defender on this side, I'll throw it away from him to lead you into the open area.’ And that's one of the things that guys learn and develop over a period of time. Guys who have caught a lot of balls – especially coming out of college – I think tend to understand that a little bit better. When you have to work the underneath zones – especially tight ends, especially slots – that's one of the things that they have to understand is where's the leverage coming from? Do I feel that guy on my inside or do I feel that guy on my outside? And anticipating that ball being thrown away from that leverage.”

**On LT Charles Leno:**

“He's progressed very well within our scheme. He's a guy that works at it. He's got a little bit of that leadership ability, but it's like he really doesn't want to take the mantles. You can see with the way he practices, the way he works with his teammates. I think he and Ereck [Flowers] have a real good combination, a real good rapport with one another. He's done a very, very good job. He was very physical this past week. When you look at what happened and look at the way he played, it was pretty solid. It was very solid actually. He's been consistent like that all year. And like I said, there really hasn't been a lot of mention of him, so that's a good thing. That's a really good thing.”

**On how having a solid offensive line allows you to open up the playbook:**

“Yes, it does because we know we don't always have to give the left side help and that means that the back or the tight end to that side can get into their routes a lot faster. We can put four or five guys into the routes because we don't have to always help. That's a big thing that it really is. That helps an awful lot because now you can attack them, attack their coverages.”

**On CB Kendall Fuller:**

“He's been steady, he's probably our most steady player as far as our corners are concerned. He's a very smart football player that gets the game and communicates well with his teammates. We're very fortunate that he's a lot healthier than he was last year, so he's playing at a better level. He really has. And again, you see him being

one of those guys that's trying to lead, that's trying to communicate out there. That really has helped that group."

**On the importance of communication in the secondary:**

"Exactly. You want guys that have communicated and work together. And as I said, one of the things that we really haven't had here has been – in the two years so far – is just continuity in the secondary yet. One of the things that I dealt with in the past is not having the same DB group for nine seasons when I was in Carolina. Every year, we had a whole new group. That's hard. What we'd like to do is get to where we have a group of guys that can play together 3, 4, 5 years before there's transition. If you can do that, if you can have at least three of the four or five guys back there repeated, I think that really creates the positive connection that you're looking for so things can go unsaid and the anticipation of knowing that there's going to be somebody that's supposed to be over the top there, or if you're playing a certain technique that there's going to be somebody on the inside. Those things are very valuable."

**On if CB Kendall Fuller is better suited on the outside in the secondary:**

"A lot of it has a tendency to do with matchups or the anticipation of what route combinations we can get. Kendall's a guy that's got very good savvy to him in terms of understanding route concepts. And sometimes if you have a guy that gets that, a guy has been doing that really good for a slightly has been [CB] Danny Johnson. You can see Danny has a good feel and a good understanding of route concepts and his anticipation has been very good. He's made a play every week. So, you can see that from certain guys and both Kendall and Danny have shown that the last couple of weeks has been very helpful."

**On controlling the time of possession, the last two weeks:**

"It goes back to four weeks, we've ran the ball well, we've been very effective running the ball and when you can grind it out and have long drives or stuff like that, two things happen. You're wearing your opponent down on defense, but secondly, you're keeping your defense fresh and that's a big thing. That's a big deal. Earlier in the year we were playing 80 something plays on defense regularly. If you go back and look at it and that takes a toll. Now, if we flip it more on the reverse and we're running the ball effectively and we are converting on third downs and we're keeping the ball. That wears on the clock that wears on the opponent that helps the defense."

**On growth he has seen in S Kam Curl in year two:**

"When studying him and getting the opportunity to draft him, we knew he was a converted corner. So he's got corner cover skills. Knowing that he has that kind of ability, he's a guy that you want to match up on players like that. I remember last year, doing that with him and gave up a couple of big catches, early, gave up a touchdown, I'm trying to remember who because I can see the games, but it was him understanding how people are going to attack. If you're playing man coverage and he knows the tight end reads it and he knows he's got post help. He's going to, widen his release to try and widen you away from that post help and then work back inside. Those are things that Kam's learned, and he understands that. Now he knows that if a guy pushes me out, he's going to try and work back to the post. I've got to be ready to squeeze with them. You see that, and you see that in practice. So, you see that he's learning and understanding those little, those little nuances to the game that he has to have."

**On if QB Taylor Heinicke could be a franchise QB at the end of the year:**

"Well, you know, we'll see. I mean, again, it's, like I said, it could be on the roster, could be in the draft, it could be a free agency, but we have to identify who we believe it can be. We've been trying to search that out and feel that out for the last year and a half now. And as we go through this, there are certain things that we are looking for. Obviously, leadership is a big part of it. Understanding, grasp of what we're doing, how we want to attack and understanding how to attack the opponent. Then having the intangibles. One of the things that that has been really cool and again, from last year's perspective, you saw certain elements when [Former Washington QB]

Alex Smith got into the huddle early on for us. You know when Kyle Allen first got his opportunity, the way he responded. Now with Taylor it is the same thing. You're seeing this type of rapport that's being built. But again, it's got to be consistent too. That's the other thing, you know, we haven't been consistent. We weren't consistent last year until Alex got his opportunity. Now we have a chance to see if we can get consistent under Taylor. And again, we're not making any decisions till everything's done this year till we got a chance to really go back vet what we saw from this past season, look at what's available coming out for agency, look at what's in the draft. We've got a lot of work to do we really do."

**On if the developmental pipeline for the offensive line is a product of the new COVID rules:**

"It's an approach we've taken in the past, but the COVID rules the way they are and allowing for a bigger practice squad has been beneficial. I also know this, being able to pop guys up and pop guys back down, creates more opportunities. Because when guys in the short-term IR has helped as well, because you don't have to put a guy in IR and you're going to lose them for the year. Now you pop a guy up, you know, he may not be ready to pop up on a full-time basis. So now you, short-term a guy, you can have them up for a week or pop them up for the week and he's backed down and you move somebody else up giving these guys this kind of experience I think is invaluable. I know this it's one of the things that John Madden had harped on for the last few years about making sure that there's more opportunities for offensive lineman to develop and when he's first started talking about that, gosh, I was still in Carolina, it was probably about six, seven years ago. And I started thinking, and so we got together. One of the things that we talked about as coaching staff and personnel was we got to do a good job assessing our offensive line depth, our defense line depth. Because those guys are hard to find. And so, we've got to find those guys and then really work them. And that's one of the things that we've been trying to do."

**On if he's had time to think about the future of the Offensive line:**

"Yeah. And that's the one things that you do have to look at these guys and say, okay, is this guy for the future? Or is this a guy just we would just like to have back. With the guys we just liked to have to back, obviously you're going to try and sign your deal. But if the future guy you're looking at two or three years, and we have to think about those, those are all things that we have to talk about as we're finishing the season up."