

April 29, 2022

Head Coach Ron Rivera and General Manager Martin Mayhew

On an explanation of why they made both of their selections:

RR: "Well, as far as [DT Phidarian] Mathis is concerned, he's a young man that played a lot of big time football. You play in the SEC and you play against the teams that you play and you know that these are legit guys. You're grading 'em against NFL quality players. So you feel good about who he is, feel good about what his potential is and what he can do for us. In terms of playing snaps, being part of a group that's gonna get an opportunity to go out and play some football for us, so pretty excited about who he is."

MM: "Outstanding football player. Really good football player. He's got size, he's got length, he's got heavy hands. Really good motor, outstanding motor. He's probably as of right now, more fully developed playing the run, but he's got some sneaky ability to rush the passer. He had nine sack last year. He's a really good football player."

On drafting RB Brian Robinson Jr. and on putting an emphasis on guys who played against top talent in college:

RR: "Well, I think you'll never question the talent that they play against when you watch specific games. And that's probably one of the things that we did. I watched their games against Georgia and I watched their games against Auburn, stuff like that. And when you see production against teams like that, you feel very good about the evaluation you're doing. As far as Brian's concerned, love the physical downhill style. I saw the stat flash that this is a guy that breaks tackles over 800 yards after contact. That's pretty impressive. He has been as consistent protecting the football over his career, I think is another thing that you like, but he's also a different type of back than what we get from [RB] Antonio [Gibson] and what we get from [RB] J.D. [McKissic]. It's one of those things that we have a trifecta of guys that you're gonna feel real good about in terms of mixing up things, and one thing is he's a very physical player."

On how much he values ball control and on Robinson's strength in that category:

RR: "That was one of the things that we talked about early on in this process. I know in talking with [General Manager] Martin [Mayhew] and [Executive Vice President of Football/Player Personnel] Marty [Hurney] and [Senior Director of Player Personnel] Eric [Stokes], as we were going into this process was finding that type of a combination of guys that we know are gonna be able to help us with that, whether it's a block or a runner, and it was something we looked at. We obviously had a pretty good grade and to have him sitting there at the end of the third round, we felt pretty fortunate."

On how they plan to distribute the ball amongst three running backs:

RR: "Well, the big thing is you've gotta be able to have a different type of effect on the game. If this game's gonna get downhill and physical and really grind it out, you want to be able to mix it in with somebody else. They may not get 20 carries, but just to change up the different type of physicality, the nature that he's gonna bring, you feel pretty good about it."

On if they have emphasized drafting players with a lot of college experience:

MM: "You like to see a good play history when you look at guys stats and look at their production over their college careers. So, it's something that we like to see. It's not necessarily always there, but in this situation, those guys have it. I think we got tougher as a football team today. I think we got more physical. I think Phidarian makes us more physical playing defensively, playing against the run. I think obviously we got more physical running the ball as well, so those guys have a history of doing that, and we like that about them."

On his emphasis on guys putting together tape where they are making big time plays in high pressure situations:

RR: "The biggest thing I evaluate is who he got it against more so than anything else. I mean, you play in rivalry games, you play against Auburn, you play against Georgia, and you feel good about what he does, what he puts on tape. That to me is really one of the things I also use to compare it. That's not just a single one thing that says, 'Hey, this is the guy or this isn't the guy.' When you talk about pass rush, it's not just what they do, but what they create, whether it's a push up in the middle and the guy can't step up, he's gotta stand back and somebody else gets a play. That's the other part of it too, that when you're evaluating pass rushers is how else are they impacted if they're not getting sacks? So, you feel pretty good about a guy like that and I think Phidarian does that for us. He gives us an opportunity to push that pocket back into the quarterbacks lap."

On if Robinson can potentially take the heavy workload off of Gibson and help to create a more balanced attack on offense:

RR: "Well, when you watch him in a style of running you always notice that the ball is high and tight, and he does a nice job with that. He's got long arms, so wrapping the ball also is an easier thing for him because of his size. I mean, young man, 6-2, he's a good sized running back. You watch him and just the way he handles himself and plays the game. It's a very physical style."

On him potentially taking a little bit of the load off of Gibson:

RR: "Well, that's part of it too because now you feel like you have a combination of running backs that on your first and second down are very physical at one point. Then we turn around, you got a little bit of a slasher with Antonio's style. But, Antonio's got some deceptive speed and quickness as well, so it's a good mix. I've been fortunate that I've had a couple of combinations of really good running backs. I see this giving us another combination of really good running backs, and then you throw J.D. into the mix and you're really gonna get a change up."

On the importance of adding defensive tackle depth in this draft:

RR: "Well, I think a big part of it too is not just depth, but a guy that you know you're gonna get snaps. You know, [former DT] Matt [Ioannidis] played over 50% of the snaps and this is a young man that's gonna get an opportunity to play a good number of that percentage as well. We do have a plan for a third down pass rush, and it may include him. It may not. It may include somebody else or a different combination of guys, but what we need to do more so than anything else is just make sure we're eating up those percentages of play time with a different combination of guys."

On if taking Mathis changes how they view DT Daron Payne:

RR: "No, not at all. I think this again is about bringing a guy in giving and him an opportunity to contribute and be a part of what we're trying to do. I think people want to jump to the conclusion just because you don't do anything now doesn't mean that you can't do something later. A lot of things have changed. It's one of the things I talked about with you guys during the press conference that when you get a veteran quarterback that has a salary, it's gonna impact your salary cap and how you respond to it. It's a difficult thing. You try to figure out the best way to be able to pay players and sometimes you can't do it right away. And so that's kind

of the situation we're in right now is we're trying to take care of certain other things as well as we go forward and we'll see how we can adjust to it. Who knows what happens after that."

On how much of the second and third round selections was best player available versus need:

MM: "I would say a combination of both. Those were guys that our scouts felt very convicted about. I had very strong conviction on both those players. We had been talking about them for a long time as how they would fit us. We had a need at that spot, so it made a lot of sense to add those guys today."

RR: "When we went into the draft, you sit there and you target each round the way we've done it and we stack players and as those players are taken off that stack, and then you see who's left. That's also part of why sometimes you have to choose now between what you want and it's not just, as Martin said, best player on the board, but also best player that fits a need as well and could potentially come into play. So, we gotta take all those things into account as we go over it. But, going into this we did talk about again, we wanted to make sure we were able to grab a defensive tackle, wanted to make sure we were able to find a combination in terms of running back, a big physical guy that can get downhill and grind it out. One of the things that talks about just how good you can be is to be able to run the football when they know you're gonna run the football and have success doing that. That's pretty doggone good. That's what we've gotta be able to do. I talked about that four game stretch when we had a lot of success running the ball and controlling the clock, it really helped us. It helped us on both phases of football. So that's something we tried to do and wanted to do consciously."

On getting tougher in this draft:

RR: "Talking about getting physical in terms of style of running game and continue that. The point being that it is a physical thing and when you only have one primary back that does that, that's an awful lot to ask of Antonio [Gibson]. So, what we're able to do is find a guy that we feel can help take some of that load and also be a load. You have a combination of guys, and again, you throw in your situational guy with JD [McKissic]. And I think it's a very good mix."

On what the running back strategy is:

RR: "A little bit of both. If you get into a situation having success running the ball, you're gonna continue to do that. If you're in where you've gotta throw the ball down field, well, then you're gonna use the guys that best fit the passing game for you. So, it'll be a little bit of both."

On going for experience in the draft:

MM: "No, I would just say, we always wanted to see a really good play history. Guys that have played and have been durable and have a ton of starts in college, those guys are more attractive to us than guys that came on just for one year. If guys had been in the program and been competing and looking for an opportunity to play that's different. We want to see the play history. It means that this guy can be consistent and can be relied upon. So, we always look for that."

On guys being surprised they had been drafted as early as they were:

RR: "Well, I think part of it is too, And I did hear one of the comments that my agent said it could be second, late second, early third, something like that. So a little surprise that happened. I think part of it is maybe the agents trying to keep the expectations in check. Again, we picked these guys because we felt that these guys fit what we do and how we want to do it. We picked these guys because we think these guys will be able to contribute and be part of rotations and play a substantial amount for us. So, maybe it is a little bit of surprise to them because of how they handled the expectations. I mean, you look at the draft and you go through the draft and you say, wow, that's a reach or man, that guy fell, well nobody thought he was gonna

fall, but he fell. This is such an inexact science. This draft is about as different as they get with the number of trades that we saw this year so far. With players, you know, being surprised by where they get picked, this is different. And, I think, again, it just shows you just how inexact this is.”

On the balance between analytics and opinions:

MM: “That’s the thing that coach has to do. I mean, [Tim Gribble] Gribs does that throughout the college meetings and everything, but when we get into the room and we start making picks, we’re explaining to coach, each of us and he’ll go around the room and ask. He’ll ask me, he’ll ask Marty [Hurney], he’ll ask Eric [Stokes], he’ll ask [Tim Gribble] Gribs. We explain how we see and then he has to filter through that and make that final decision. So, it’s very, very subjective. But we have a lot of experience in that room. And a lot of guys who have seen a lot of players, so we have strong opinions and finally coach makes those final calls.”

RR: “And we’ll check with the coaches as well to make sure that these guys do fit. You know, because it’s not just about how fast they run and how high they jump, but whether or not their skillset fits what we wanna do and how we want to do it. So, you know, it is a collaborative effort. It is one of those things that, you know, we wanna make sure everybody’s feeling good about what we’re doing and we’re confident in it. And, and I can tell you, everybody’s been confident about what we’ve decided. These are guys that we believe fit what we wanna do. And I mean, ultimately yeah, I’m the one who pulls the trigger and makes the decision. But I think ultimately, these three picks have been guys that we all like collectively.”

On Phidarian Mathis being a leader:

RR: “Well, I think more than anything else, I think not necessarily his voice, but, just his presence. He’s a big physical guy, like the style of play Martin talked about, how tough he is. Leadership is important. I do like the guys that we have there right now, I think we’ve got some pretty good leaders at that spot. But I think this is also a young man that can be here and be part of what we’re trying to do.”

On how WR Jahan Dotson will play with WR Terry McLaurin and WR Curtis Samuel

RR: “I think as a group, not just those two, but I think he’s going to be able to mix him with the other guys for the most part, you know, we have 5, 6, 7 guys that we feel very comfortable with, and it’s about getting guys opportunities on the football field. He will play a number of positions for us. I’m very confident in his ability to learn and grow and develop as a football player.

On getting the needs early tomorrow:

RR: “Well, I mean, obviously there are some needs that we want to make sure we take care of as we go into the final day of the draft. We feel very fortunate. Martin was able to make a pretty good deal for us or where we put ourselves back into the third round and we were able to get a player we feel good about now we got an extra one for the fourth round. So we feel very comfortable with that, you know, so we have a chance to fill some more needs and take some pretty good players cuz they are early in the fourth round for us too.”

On what he attributes to this draft being affected by trades:

RR: “It’s been interesting. There hasn’t really been where you sit there and say, wow, this guy’s a must got to have type guy. And so you don’t see those things happening and it’s almost unpredictable as to who’s taking what guy from what position group, and then has there been a run on certain position groups or not? I mean, it is different and it’s not really impacting what we’re doing or why we’re doing it. But it is impacting how we’re doing it.”

On the QB's sliding further down the draft and if its tempting to draft one:

MM: "Yeah, for me I'm actually surprised. I was not surprised to not see a quarterback go in the top half of the first round, but I was surprised to see guys lasting to the third round. And so I can't attribute to anything, you know, it's probably each individual team making that decision based on their needs and based on their roster. But it was a surprise to me."

RR: "Yeah. I mean, again, it goes back to what I said, this is a little bit different, a little bit strange. People predicting guys that go a certain spot and they don't, that happens. And again, the value is what you decide to put on that player by deciding to pick 'em there. I think that's probably the fairest thing to say, some people may see it one way and somebody sees it another way. That's the only real answer to it, you know. Just because you have a feeling about it doesn't necessarily mean it's right or wrong. It's just your opinion. And that's probably the biggest thing to say about these decisions on what happened, especially with the quarterback position."