

April 30, 2022

## **Head Coach Ron Rivera and General Manager Martin Mayhew**

### **On if they thought that QB Sam Howell would slide in the draft:**

RR: "No, we didn't think he would slide to us. It's interesting because once we got [QB] Carson [Wentz] as our starter, we got off the quarterback train for the most part. We did know that as I said, there was an opportunity for us to take one as a backup and a guy that you could develop for the long term. We most certainly considered that. But to have Sam fall to us was something we had to jump on. We had a very good grade on him. He was at that point, the highest guy left on our board. He was a guy that we most certainly as we dug into initially and was a guy that if we were still in that situation, would've been somebody we considered very seriously, so we feel this is a home run for us. It was a good opportunity to grab a guy. I had an opportunity to talk with Carson before we made the pick, I wanted to make sure he understood that this is just all about developing a young guy more so than anything else. He's our number one going forward, and he just appreciated the fact that I gave him the heads up, which I thought was really cool. He was actually pretty excited because he just thinks that there are a lot of good things about Sam."

### **On their overall thoughts on how the draft went:**

MM: "I thought it went very well. Again, our process was very good. I can't say enough about the great job that [Director of College Personnel] Tim Gribble did as far as leading our area scouts, getting them out there on the road and managing our meetings and then getting together with the coaches. When we got here, the coaches did a lot of work on the evaluations as well. They did an outstanding job, so very, very smooth process. Very good group of guys that we're working with, myself, [Executive Vice President of Player Personnel/Football] Marty [Hurney], working with Gribbs [Tim Gribble] and [Senior Director of Player Personnel] Eric [Stokes] and [Director of Pro Personnel] Chris [Polian], there's a very good feel of where we are right now and how we're functioning as a personnel department. So very, very smooth process. We're excited about the guys that we're able to draft over the last couple days. [WR Jahan] Dotson, we have really big expectations for him. He's gonna fit right into what we're doing offensively. We can use him in a variety of different ways. [DT Phidarian] Mathis is gonna be in a rotational system for us with our defensive tackles. We talked a lot about the last time that we ended up getting together about these projections and where guys are supposed to go. I think [QB] Sam Howell is a great example of that. You know, people are making projections about where they expect players to go. They're not in these buildings, they're not around these teams. We understand our needs and what we need as a football team much better than people on the outside looking in. That's why you end up with situations like Phidarian going in the second round, surprising some folks, Sam going in the fifth round, surprising some folks. Everybody has their own system and everybody sets up their program the way they want to set it up. We have different needs and we look at our teams differently than some other people would do."

### **On how he felt the trades worked out for the team:**

MM: "I thought it worked out well for us overall. I mean, you don't always get what you want every single time. You know, sometimes you're moving back and you're looking at different charts and values and it's not exactly what you want, but it's what you need to do as a football team to try to get better. I'm happy with the process and the way things worked out."

**On how important it was for them to get players with a lot of college experience in this draft:**

RR: "Well, you'd like to think that the early on picks that you're anticipating that they're gonna be able to contribute one way or the other and more so when you get into your top four, you want some sort of impact from them. We feel like we've got guys that can come in and help impact what we're doing on offense or defense and that they can also contribute on special teams if they had to. Looking at what we did, we have guys that we think that are gonna come in, be part of some rotation, be part of some opportunity to play for us and truly contribute. And if we get anything from the guys later on, that we feel would be an extra bonus. Probably the guy that I think is very intriguing to us more so than anybody is [TE] Cole Turner. This is a dynamic pass catcher. He's played in a spread style offense. He's a guy that's a big target, he's got a tremendous catch radius, runs good routes and knows how to separate at the right time. It's gonna be very intriguing as we watch the development and growth of these players from this point until we get into the season."

**On if the team has not filled a ton of needs through free agency because of the amount of impact players they have coming back from injury:**

RR: "Very much so. I mean, we're counting on these guys. We missed several players last year because of injury. We anticipate getting those guys back on the football field and contributing. We also feel that some of the guys that we have added are the types of guys that are gonna give us some opportunities. I mean, the thing that we gotta also remember is that when you bring in somebody like a Carson Wentz and you give up a draft pick, that's basically who that guy is. You know what I'm saying? He is our third round pick this year. If you really want to say this, so you could say that that was something we did to add onto our football team. And so that's how that pick was used, was to get us our starting quarterback."

**On if the team took more experienced college prospects because of the expectation of taking a leap as a team this season:**

RR: "Not necessarily, but it's always good to have guys that you can plug in and get some contribution from. We're not done because again, as you take a look at your roster and then you kind of reset yourself, there are some things that you may want to fill in. Last year we were able to fill in a couple of spots that we really thought we felt good about. We found our left tackle, we found our returner after the draft. So again, we as a coaching staff will get together on Monday and really just sit down and talk about where we are and where we're headed. We'll continue in the OTA program with our guys starting Phase 2."

**On what separated Howell from some of the other quarterback prospects they looked at:**

RR: "Well, I think first and foremost it would be unfair if you didn't consider his 2020 season, just looking back at what he did. I mean, I saw a lot of them last year because they had several players that were coming out, skilled players that we watched. They had two really good running backs, two quality wide receivers and we obviously ended up drafting [WR] Dymari Murray [Brown]. And when you do that, you get an opportunity to see this guy play. Well, he also lined up in front of a brand new offensive line. So, a lot of things changed from 2020 to 2021. And so taking that into consideration and being fair to him saying, this is a guy that had a whole group of new starters that he had to try and work with and get used to and yet he was still very, very productive. They won a lot of games, got into a bowl game and I believe he threw for over 3000 yards and rushed for over a thousand. I think he accounted for something like 30 something touchdowns. I'm trying to remember all those stats. But, I thought he was impressive enough that like I said, he was very high on our board and he was somebody that stuck out when sitting there looking at the beginning of the fifth round. You just said, this is a value pick, a developmental pick. This is a guy that has no pressure, where he can sit back, learn from a couple of quality guys and who knows what happens later on."

**On what kind of a role he envision for S Percy Butler:**

RR: "Well, I think the biggest thing as far as his role is here's a guy that's gonna get an opportunity to compete. He'll compete at a couple spots. Nickel will be one of them and safety will be the other one because of his skillset and the things that he does. He's a guy that has a specific skillset that we really feel is very intriguing. First of all, he has got tremendous speed and quickness. He's a guy that's gonna not just help us as a defensive player, but he will also contribute on special teams. I think this is a guy that can help make an immediate impact for us."

MM: "Yeah, I mean the guy's got speed. He's fast. He's physical, he's got versatility. He can play the nickel. He can play free safety. He brings a lot to the table and we saw enough flashes of him playing last year that we feel he's a guy who can develop into a really good player for us."

RR: "He's a tough player. He played hurt last year and really didn't make a lot of bones about it, did the best he could while he was hurting. And it was just intriguing to watch a guy that was gutting it out. I mean, that's something that sticks out to you when you talk about players."

**On if Howell was the player they referenced on Monday as the quarterback who they had a high grade on:**

RR: "We like Sam. As I said, for the reasons that I talked about. I really did. We spent a lot time looking at his 2020 tape, took a lot of time looking at his 2021 tape and I actually read a really interesting article about him. And the thing that really was pointed out in the article was the loss of playmakers and then the loss of the offensive line in front of him, and then the switch to what they were doing offensively to try and capitalize on his ability. I mean, this is a guy that can be a very solid future player for us down the line. I mean, we're very fortunate to have Carson as our starting quarterback and knowing that this is a guy that can take us into the future, and here's a young guy that could eventually grow into it and become the kind of guy that can back us up for a while. You feel confident and comfortable in it. We've got two really good veteran quarterbacks with a young guy that's gonna be developed for us over a period of time."

**On if he sees a theme for this draft:**

RR: "Well, I think more than anything else, it's just a combination of filling the needs that we believe we had, but also developing and grabbing guys that are gonna help us develop the rest of the way. And again, guys that you can put on the field. Like I said, we're anticipating the number of these guys, especially the first four are gonna get an opportunity to come out and contribute and play. So, it's exciting to know that we feel comfortable and confident with those guys."

**On if they felt like they needed to target tough football players in this draft:**

MM: "We always want to try to get more physical and play a more physical brand of football. You always wanna get faster through a draft. You wanna get younger, you wanna get healthier. Being more physical is important to us, especially in our division. So, we feel good about this group of guys, and we think these guys are gonna help us in that way. It's not that we weren't tough before, but I don't think in this game, you can be too physical."

**On what feel he gets on QB Sam Howell's leadership:**

RR: "Well, you know, it is interesting, and you talk to some of the people that are around the UNC program, that he is very well liked guy. A lot of players do rally around him, and it was really interesting because having come from Carolina, just knowing a number of people that I know down in the Carolina area were kind of excited that he's coming up here. So it was kind of a cool thing."

**MM:** “One thing that really impressed me about him last year was the pro day at North Carolina. When all those guys were coming out, he came out and threw for those guys. And a lot of guys would not do that if they didn't have to. And he put on a show, he put on a show, and I was there. [Executive Vice President of Football for Player Personnel] Marty [Hurney] was there. We all saw that. He really caught my eye on that day, and I started watching him. And I was really impressed with the season last year. And like Coach [Rivera] said, he lost a lot of weapons and I thought they modified the game plan somewhat to try to adjust for that, which I think took away from his ability to play his best ball this past year. So I'm really excited about having him with us.”

**On if QB Taylor Heinicke is still the number two quarterback:**

**RR:** “Taylor's our backup, please understand that, that this is a guy that is going to grow and develop over a period of time. I mean, there's no hurry to force him out there or anything like that. This is a good chance for him to get a real good education and develop and see what happens.”

**On developing the Buffalo Nickel position:**

**RR:** “No, we feel pretty good about what we did Nicki. I think as we said, a guy that we feel strong about is [S] Percy [Butler]. You know, he's a young man that has a, a very good skillset. And we also have some guys that are on our current roster that have played that position and have played it well for us. Percy just adds to helps add to the mix and, and we can do some things I think with the right personnel on the field.”

**On what made TE Cole Turner intriguing as a prospect:**

**RR:** “When you watch the tape and you watch his catch radius, I mean it's really impressive. His quarterback, Carson Strong as a young man that caught our eye initially, had an opportunity to watch him watch his tape. And there was one guy that kept standing out and when you watch him and you get an opportunity to watch Cole, you see the catch radius. Carson's a big strong guy and he threw the ball hard. Threw the ball with touch, you know, deep balls where the guy had to go get them and make plays. So, you saw this trim in his catch radius from a tight end. And so that's what's very intriguing about this and I'm not saying he is, but he reminded me of [Former Carolina Panthers Tight End] Greg Olson when the ball was in his area and he was covered. He had the ability to separate using his body, keeping himself between the defender and the ball. And so when you see flashes like that and it reminds you of somebody that's a very good football player, um, you, you feel this is somebody we got to continue to watch. And we did, and we followed it and put a lot of work into the tape. We went and had a private workout and had an opportunity to really watch him excel.”

**On if there is a player in this draft that can start right away:**

**MM:** “I don't wanna put any more pressure on these players. I mean, they're all young, they're all rookies. All of them have a very bright future with us and we drafted them for a reason. We believe in these guys. It's hard for me to find one that I don't think can eventually become a starter on this list. So, they're all very talented and they're all young players coming in and they're all growing into whatever role that they end up with.”

**On adding UDFA's:**

**RR:** “No, we're working on that right now. This was as Martin talked about yesterday, just how, how good the situation looked in the middle rounds. There's a little bit of a spillover from the COVID situation. Knowing right now that you know, our Scouts are grinding right now, trying to pull a couple of guys that are undrafted as soon as it ends, we'll be ready to roll. So, we're trying to get ourselves ready to go and see if we can pull

in, you know, five, 10 more guys.”

**On if this was the draft they envisioned:**

RR: To a degree, but I mean, with the number of trades and trades we made, Martin was on the phone every day, looking, trying to work something and it was a little different just because you only had one quarterback go and that wasn't until later. Just there wasn't where you sat there and said, 'these are gotta have guys.' But this was also a draft that as you got into the middle round, you could fill needs.”

**On the biggest surprise:**

“That Sam was sitting there in the fifth round. I mean, to me, it really was. And again, we just felt really comfortable, but this is one of those things. And it kind of goes back to the philosophy that if you get an opportunity to draft a quarterback later on, you should always consider that.”

**On if they'd be willing to say they had a second-round grade on Howell:**

RR: “We had a high grade on him. Were we gonna take him earlier? No, because we feel very comfortable with what we've done with Carson. We really do. I mean, we like Carson, we believe Carson's our guy going forward, and we believe he can lead our football team. And, you know, when you have the type of backup that you have with Taylor, you feel great about it. I mean, it's a good situation. And quite honestly, we needed a third quarterback, a guy that we have to have developing to be ready just in case.”

**On pursuing veteran free agents:**

“I think once we get through with the college free agents, the situation will be now, we look at where we are, where we stand, as I said, you know, earlier, we're gonna get together on Monday, sit down and talk about what we've done, where we are and what we feel our next biggest need is.”

**On turning in the card for Sam in the fourth round:**

RR: No. Percy filled the need that we were looking at. He's a guy that we felt very good about. I know Martin speaking about it. He was a guy that he just said, 'Hey, we gotta really consider this guy because of his skillset. And what we think one of our needs are.’”

**On guys that are from smaller programs, how important is it to see those guys at the Senior Bowl that helps with that process:**

MM: “Yeah. It's always good to see those guys that don't come from the top programs at the Senior Bowl and competing against a higher level of competition. That's where you learn, you learn quite a bit, you can learn quite a bit watching those guys. Sometimes you're watching tape of smaller schools. And you're wondering like, who was this guy really playing against? He's playing really well, but who was this guy who was across from him? So when you get to see him match up with some of the SEC guys and some of the ACC guys and guys from the power five conferences, it gives you a better measure of kind of where they fit in.”

**On anything that stuck out from those moments:**

MM: “Yeah. Well, Cole's ability to go up and catch the ball. All that coach said, his catch radius, his hands, he has incredible, really, really good hands. Carson Strong threw a lot of back shoulder fades to him. They were on the same page, actually roommates, but they were on the same page. His ability to work with the quarterback and to find open spaces was impressive. You saw that in his games in college, but you also saw that the all-star games too.”

RR: “And I think the thing about Percy, speed is speed. And he moves fast, he plays fast, he's got good,

quick twitch. He's a guy that I think had that specific skill that really stood out and said, you know what? This is one of his blue blood traits. And you've gotta go with that, especially where we had him lined up.”