

January 4, 2023

Head Coach Ron Rivera

Opening Statement:

"First I wanna start off by opening up and giving our thoughts and prayers as an organization to Damar Hamlin, his family, his friends, the Buffalo Bills organization and the community of Buffalo. We know it was a terrifying situation that transpired, and we're praying for Damar and hoping that he's able to make a full recovery. We talked about what happened in our team meeting this morning. We talked about the mental help people are available. If any players have any concerns or questions they want to talk about and then Coach [Randy] Jordan led us in a team prayer. I just wanted to open up by saying that we're thinking of that young man, his family, and everyone is impacted by that situation."

On the quarterback plans for this week:

"Our plan is we are going to start Sam [Howell]. I spoke with the coaches, talked to some of the team leaders and talked with some others about it and we feel that this is an opportunity for us to give Sam a chance to show us what he's capable of. I think that the opportunity is gonna be a good one for him to go out and play football and just kind of show us, I mean, we're not gonna judge everything on Sam based on just one game. We are gonna get an opportunity to see him and see how he prepares and gives himself the opportunity to play."

On what made them decide to go with QB Sam Howell:

"Well, I think at first initially is obviously, it would be his first start and it would become a little bit of a circus having to deal with all the things that come with being a starter. But also, you look at the opponent and who you're playing and what they're playing for. Going with Taylor [Heinicke] would've given us an opportunity to see what they're doing, how they're doing it, and would've given Sam a chance to take a look at it, if we had gone with Taylor. But at the end of the day, at some point if Sam ever gets the opportunity to be a starter, this would be the chance. Why not get it over with now and go from there. But the most important thing is that we're really intrigued in terms of watching and seeing what Sam can do as a quarterback in this league."

On who will be the backup quarterback:

"Yes, Taylor [Heinicke] will be the primary back."

On why not starting QB Carson Wentz after last week:

"Just decided that we'd go with Taylor."

On his reaction to what happened with Bills S Damar Hamlin:

"The biggest thing more so than anything else was just hoping and praying that the young man

would be fine. Damar, what happened to him was one of those very one-offs. But at the same time, after you see that, you immediately think and pray and hope that he's gonna be fine.”

On if any of the younger players will play on Sunday:

“Yeah, we're gonna look to play some of our younger guys and give some opportunities. See who they are and we'll go from there.”

On you compartmentalize and understand that football is violent, but it is worth the risk:

“Well, I mean, there's risk in everything you do and one of the things that can help mitigate risk obviously is training yourself properly. Keeping yourself in top physical shape, mental shape. I think also learning your base fundamentals to the nth degree. I mean, becoming as good as you can at that. And then at the same time, you've gotta sit there and weigh the risks because you just never know. It's crazy, but something like this could happen and, and you just don't know that. But you could also say that for everyday life. You just don't know when something's gonna come up and so I think that's probably how we do it. I mean, at least I know that's how I did it. And it is one of those things that I was also very fortunate that I never had to have surgery or anything. But I think a big part of it is a lot of guys we look at the risks involved, but we also just realize that risk is all around us.”

On what he has seen from Howell this season and what is conversation with him was:

“Well I will say this, like I said, I earlier to Ben's question was I had thought about going with Taylor and actually talked to him about that. And then after having an opportunity to rethink and talk with some other folks about it. Talked to some of the team leaders and other players and coaches for that matter. It really came down to finding out about the young man. So, when I sat down with him, we talked about it, he was excited and I said, look, you're ready. And he was, yes, I'm ready. I'm ready to roll. Well, if you go back and look, when Carson was first injured and had surgery, he became the primary backup. So, watching Sam every day and getting a chance to watch how he performed against the defense and those little detail things I talked about that I felt he had to work on coming out of training camp, you could see that he was doing those things. He was working. He was getting a feel for that. And a lot of times, when you're doing scout team, that's a good indicator as to how guys can develop and grow. It was very interesting because a couple of guys that I talked with today, one of the things that they did say was they felt he was ready for his opportunity, and this would be a good chance to watch him. So I think that was a big part of the reason too, as well, is that just how people felt based on the things that we saw during that stretch that, those, those five and a half, six weeks that he was the primary backup. You got a chance to see him compete every day against the number ones.”

On if there was any consideration to go back to Wentz:

“No, you know, we talked about all our options and opportunities and like I said, initially my first thought was Taylor. But again, as we continued to talk about this and work through this and on up in today, like I said, last night, I had an idea, I had a thought, and this morning came in and talked again and talked some more, and really just felt that if we're gonna do it, now's the chance. Let's do it. I don't put it make it just kind of get it over with but to go through the process and see how he handles it.”

On how to frame the expectations for Howell properly:

“Exactly what you said. I mean, we've had a number of veteran guys that, for the most part, have played these last four or five weeks injured, beat up. This was kind of a culmination of it all. We were hoping to have a few guys available. We probably won't but we'll have other guys available, so we'll see.”

On players he's excited about getting a chance to see the field:

“Oh, yeah. There's several young guys that we want to get some more opportunities to put them out on the field. [G] Chris Paul is a young man we want to take a really good look at and want to continue to look at those young tight ends. We know who the receiving group is. Defensively, we got some young defensive linemen we want to take a look at, and we'll get a chance to see them continue and some of the young DB's.”

On the receiver's workload against Dallas:

“Well, for the most part they'll come in, they'll play, and as the game unfolds, we'll go from there.”

On what he saw from QB Sam Howell today:

“One thing we've always felt was, he has a live arm he really does, quick decision making and he took pretty good command early on. Right from the beginning, stepped in the huddle and it was really crisp. Broke the huddle really well. I think on the fourth play, somebody had made a mistake in formation in motion, and he stopped it and got back in the huddle and started all over again. So he was willing to step up and take command.”

On what led to his decision not to start QB Taylor Heinicke:

“There were several people I talked to that gave me some ideas and some thoughts. I just wanted to make sure I was weighing all the options and opportunities and reasons why. I mean, there's enough reasons why to start him, and enough reasons why not to. And it's just a matter of, at the end of the day, he's going to get an opportunity to play, why not just start from the beginning more so than anything else.”

On the biggest challenge for QB Sam Howell:

“Well, I think more so anything else is just decision making. I mean, he's going to face a pretty good team that's playing for something and he's just going to have to make good decisions and go from there.”

On if he feels if this team has met his expectations and taken the next step:

“I'd like to believe we did. I think we did some really good things. I think there was a point where what we were sixth in the whole playoff hunt. We got ourselves there, we played some pretty good football and some things happened that we just couldn't sustain. We went through a period with some injuries and lost some guys for the season that we didn't have available. We've played several games that way. We didn't have running backs from the very beginning. We finally got that together and as things came together, we showed what we could do and then some unfortunate situations. So do I think we stepped forward? Yeah, I do. Do I think we showed we have a pretty good core of

young guys? Yes, I think so. And do we have enough young guys, our veteran guys around those young guys? I think we do, but I do think there's a couple positions that we can shore up that we need to shore up. And again, it comes back to the one question that's looming over everybody, and that's the quarterback position. I was kind of hoping that we had found a solution and who knows, we may not, we may have, we'll find out on Sunday how we feel about it coming out of it. But do I feel good enough? Yeah, I do. I really do. I mean, we did some good things you'd like to believe. Now we had some opportunities we didn't capitalize on, and that's on us. That's on me. But at the end of the day, I feel good about that.”

On conversations with QB Carson Wentz:

“They've been good and I think, you know, going forward we got a lot more evaluating to do.”

On if he needed to talk to QB Carson Wentz about making a change after the Browns game:

“I think it was kind of understood. But I talked with him in this morning to the quarterbacks and went from there.”

On DE Chase Young's performance:

“Better. He really was. Again, still see a little tentativeness. In fact, we talked yesterday about it. There was one play in particular where the play cut back on him, and you could see for a second when he did stick that leg in the ground, he kind of got stuck and he knew exactly. So when I mentioned it to him, and when I said it to him, he knew exactly what I was talking about. And he said, yeah, I'm still a little tentative on some of those things, coach. I'm still working on it, I'm still getting through it. And one of the things I said to him, I said, you know, this is the thing about it. When you come back, you're never the same guy initially. You've got to work your way back into it. And Dr. Andrews told him, was that you're not going to be that guy right off the bat. It's going to come in time. And I said, if you want to take an example, just look at [Giants RB] Saquon Barkley. Last year everybody was wondering what happened. And this year, he's playing back to form, so I said, it'll come. He was pretty excited about it, how he played. There's still some things that we want him to continue to work on and grow on. And it's coming because he had a chance for a couple of sacks he missed and it really was just trying to get him to understand, Hey, you got to trust in that one more step. And I think that that'll come over time.”

On if he wants DE Chase Young to play the entire game:

“Well, we want to see him play. We most certainly do, but again, we will, we will look at the situation and circumstances. I mean we are playing for the future. Obviously, we wanna win. I mean, that's first and foremost as far as I'm concerned. But we also have to think about going forward. And that's part of why the decision was made about [QB] Sam [Howell]. Everything we're doing really is about winning, but it's also about seeing what we have going forward.”

On what specifically he will be looking at from QB Sam Howell in terms of his progression:

“Well, first and foremost, there's a lot of little details we talked about that was footwork, you know, what's his footwork like? Second thing is his decision making. A couple times in the pre-season, the thing that he got stuck on was when that first or second guy that he had gone to wasn't there. He

waited, he waited, and then he got hit. And what he's got to understand is when it's live situation, and as mentioned, it's completely different pre-season practice in real time. So he can't sit there and wait for that guy to open. He's got to either get to the next one or get rid of the ball or get out of the pocket.”

On if he talked with QB Taylor Heinicke about any long-term possibilities:

“Well, we'll get into what we want to do going forward with personnel once the season's over. But my conversation with him was terrific. He's a heck of a young man and he really helped me through this in terms of decision making.”

On if ownership was involved with the decision to start QB Sam Howell:

“No, this was done by everybody in that office, in that facility and a couple of special people that I rely on for their input.”

On players on the injury report playing against Dallas:

“Yes. there'll be a few of 'em that will make it.”