

THE WASHINGTON COMMANDERS

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PERFORMANCE CENTER

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Defensive Coordinator Joe Whitt Jr.

Opening Statement:

“All right, so we'll get started with the last game first, and then we'll move to Dallas [Cowboys]. You know, couple things. You know, we didn't get any turnovers and they got three. We had three opportunities. I mean, real opportunities on defense and one on special teams. So that makes four. We dropped two and then the ball went up and we didn't get it. So, what do we have to do as coaches? I mean, we have to put them in and expose them. We're doing different drills this week. Exposing them to different ball drills to make sure that we come down with those balls. We talked about it the last two wins that we had when we got in sudden changed, the offense turned the ball over, we didn't allow points. Okay? This game, we allowed 13 points. Alright, so that's not good enough. We went into this game number one versus the screen, and they hit some screens on us for a number of yards, which was, you know, new to us this year. And then the running back run game. They ran the ball for the first time. You know, with the running back, they got significant yards. You know, in our missed tackles, I think we're at 12 percent. That puts us at 17th in the league. If you are at 11 percent, that puts you in top 10. So, one percent better in our missed tackles will get us where we want to be. If you look at it from a ratio, if you just look at the raw number which is, I don't think a fair way of looking at it because if you take the tackles versus the missed tackles, and that's how you get the ratio from that standpoint. There were some positives from the game. I thought [DT Daron] Payne played well. [DT Javon] JK [Kinlaw] played well, [CB] Trey [Amos] and [LB] Frankie [Luvu]. But at the end of the day, we're here to win. And so, we're not necessarily looking for positives. We're here to win. So, moving forward to Dallas had a lot of history with those guys being there for three years. [Dallas Cowboys QB] Dak [Prescott] is playing the best ball that he's playing, man. He is playing at a high, high level, getting the ball out of his hands. He has really good eligibles outside. [Dallas Cowboys WR] CeeDee [Lamb] will be back, [Dallas Cowboys WR KaVontae] Turp [Turpin] will be back. So, the running back is running hard. The offensive line is blocking really good. [Dallas Cowboys OL] Tyler Smith, you know, one of the best guards, the young rookie [G] Booker, he's playing well. [Dallas Cowboys T Terence] Steele's playing well, they're blocking in as a unit. The tight ends, [Dallas Cowboys TE Jake] Ferguson, you know, he's highly targeted. Dak has a comfort level with him. They're putting up a lot of points. They're good running pass. They're very good offense. And so, we have our work cut out for us. We just have to, you know, nail it back down. And like I said, we're trying to get off this rollercoaster and like last week I talked about not being known and we are staying on it. So hopefully, we can get off and start playing consistent play. Any questions?”

On what led to the Chicago Bears success against the defense with their screen play:

“There were a couple things. You know, one screen that they hit on us that I guess got the biggest yards, you know, that we went the wrong way with one guy and that allowed the blockers to get up and then there were two that I think got around 11 or 12 yards. And, you know, sometimes that's

going to happen in the screen. They had good plays on that, but there was one that really got too many yards that normally didn't happen. Then we hit one in the back field on the tight end screen. We've done really nice against the screen with that, this game, with our pressure. It got behind us a little bit."

On the difference he's seen in Prescott:

"You know, Dak has always played well. I just see him really getting the ball out of his hand really quick. He plays with great anticipation. His back foot's hitting the ground and the ball's coming out. He can allude people in the pocket. He can make every throw. He's faster and stronger than people really give him credit for. And so, and then when you have CeeDee and [Dallas Cowboys WR George] Pickens on the outside and not only them you have the running back that doesn't allow you to place, you know, a lot of cover two against them because the running back can run know through tackle. So, the combination of all three makes it very, very difficult to put hats over the top of those guys outside. And then once they get the ball, you know, CeeDee's like a running back once he gets the ball in his hand."

On if it's hard practicing missed tackles when there aren't many live hits during practice:

"I don't think, you know, for the simple fact that, you know, this is the NFL and this is how you have to practice in the NFL, there's nobody doing it any differently. Okay? You have to make sure that you're getting your body, your bending at the inner of tackles. In practice, we're not putting our, you know, some of, like yesterday was a walkthrough, so bend at the end, get your body in position, throw hands and get multiple people there. Vice tackle. Don't leave a guy on a singular tackle when multiple people can be there. So, you have to make sure the details of that because we know we're not going to the ground, but nobody's going to the ground at this time of the year. So, like I said, right now we're at 12 percent in missed tackles and if we get one percent better, that's going to put us in top 10. If we get to 10 percent, that will put you top five. So, the margins are small in NFL, you know what I'm saying? So, we're at 17th right now. That's not where we want to be. We want to be top 10, moving into the top five in that area. So, we will continue to work at it and get it done."

On Pickens has brought to the Cowboys offense and the challenges he will present:

"He's one of the best deep ball catchers body control to the catch in the league. I mean, he can run the slant and run away from you, but at the same time, his ability to track the ball and get body control to it is unique and rare. It's a lot like [Former Cincinnati Bengals WR] AJ Green was in his early years. I thought he was a really good deep ball catcher. This guy is along that line of what AJ used to do, where AJ was catching over his eyes. He has the ability to contort his body to go get it."

On continuing to push for turnovers as the season goes on:

"You know, we got to do a better job as coaches and exposing them in the drills you know? We had two in our hands that we dropped. Okay, so why are we dropping them? Alright, are we giving them those type of tips and overthrows type balls in practice enough? Are we giving the linebackers the drive throws when they have to fall back when they're in different spaces? We have to make sure as coaches that we expose to guys, because I do, I'm a firm believer of when we expose them. When they understand it, they're going to make the plays. You know what I'm saying? So, we'll do a better job of that."

On the run stoppage against the Chicago Bears and changes that need to be made towards stopping the run this week:

"You know, still in between the tackles, the two big guys did a nice job with Kinlaw and Payne. We

missed [DT] Eddie [Goldman], you know, it would've been nice to have him, but the ball on the C and D gaps we're getting outside and so we have to do a better job of setting edges and making, making sure that we're flowing. People still aren't running in between the tackles, they didn't necessarily run in between the tackles, it was more perimeter runs. So, we have to sure that the C and D gaps and the crack toss and those plays that got outside of us, we have to do a better job of sending edges and those things.”

On key things the defense needs to do in order to slow Prescott down:

“You know, he's having a great year. Everybody sees it. I think, you know, we've pressured the quarterback really well. We have to hit him. Alright? But he's the type of quarterback, always judge the quarterback once you hit him. Do they look at the rush? He doesn't look at the rush. He keeps his eyes downfield. He's a real quarterback. Most quarterbacks or younger quarterbacks, or when you hit him, they start looking at the rush. He doesn't do that. You can hit him. He's a very tough man, so I understand that. But we have to hit him, and we have to make sure that he's uncomfortable in the pocket because if he's sitting back there hitting his back foot, getting the ball out to these eligibles he's really, really good. So, we have to find a way to get to him and hit him.”

On what he has seen the defense do consistently:

“Well, you know, our third down has been good. Okay. We've, our situation is, you know, third down, fourth down, we are getting off the fields in those situations. The ability to, you know, the completion percentage is down the runs up until this last week was good. You know, if we can take the explosive play, so like the play on the sideline where we had the miss tackle that went, you know, that's the tackle that we have to make, you know what I'm saying? And we have to do a better job of drilling that, you know, as coaches, you know? And then coming through with that because we get that ball down, all right? It is a first down on in that situation and now they have to go longer ways. But, you know, just work at it, you know, like I just told the guys I today, you know, like [Head Coach] DQ said in his opening press conference when he first got here, you know, doing hard shit with good people. It's hard. Nobody said this was going to be easy, but we'll get it done. You know that if we're going to walk around here with a negative cloud on us, which we're not, which I'm not, you know, because that's not productive, all right, we're going to work at it. We're going to try to find ways we're going to be creative, but at the end of the day, we got to win. You know, all this lip service and talking that I'm doing, if we don't win, it don't really matter. All right? So, we got to win. The fun in football is winning. And I understand the fans, you know, they're passionate and that's how they should be. Alright. They should be passionate about these Commanders, and we got to do a better job. Period.”

On CB Trey Amos:

“Trey's played really well. I mean he's, especially when it's outside the numbers the kid has, I mean every week he's played well. I mean, he's been a consistent, consistent player and I've been pleased with him.”

On the defense's strength:

“Pressuring the quarterback right now. The D-line I would say would definitely the strength. Yes.”

On knowing when to stick to the team's strengths versus reacting to what the opposing offense is doing:

“You know, they [Chicago Bears] had been more 12 personnel, right? And so, but if they, when they went 11, you know, that's not a weakness of ours. You know, we can pressure the quarterback and

play really well out of 11 personnel, especially two-by-two. We've been playing, looking, just looking at some of the analytics, been playing really well in two-by-two situations in 11 personnel. I was anticipating more 12 and more [LB Jordan] Magee being able to get out there, but they didn't, they didn't put 12 out there. So, you know, the offense dictates what personnel they put out there and then we, you know, we try to match it as much as possible. Hopefully you understand the fact that if we put our four three look out there versus 12, now it limits some of our pressures because now you have linebackers match on receivers, alright? And that's not what you want. And so, or you could get real predictable because now you have to blitz the linebacker that's over the receiver, which they know will probably coming because they're knowing that you're not going to have Magee covering the slot receiver. So that's why we go with our nickel package versus 11. A lot of the times."

On what a defense can do against an offense with speed:

"I don't feel like we really face a team that necessarily had a speed advantage. We have fast guys on the outside. We're fast upfront, but if you do have a team that necessarily has a top off guy, you can play cover two to it. You can roll to them; you can stay over the top of them. There's ways that you can calculate those guys, but that wasn't the case this last game."

On why the defense struggles with plays to the perimeter:

"Well, we got to set the edge, that wasn't a speed deal. It was the ability to set the edge and make sure that that balls turns back. It wasn't that it was getting out there before it because of speed. It was the edge setting on it."

On the reason behind giving up explosive plays:

"It's the execution and the communication that if we have great pre-snap communication, it provides better post snap play. And so, a lot of the plays are plays that we've gone over. We just have to make sure we're executing them on game day. That's just what it is. And some of them, like I said, the big play that hit us in this last game, it was a play that should have gone for eight, it went for 55 because of a missed tackle. That falls into that same bucket of explosives."

On the keys to being successful against Dallas on third down:

"When we get an opportunity to rush him, to win. Making sure that when he hits his back foot that there's not people open that he can get the ball out of his hands. To change the pitcher as much as possible. That's what typically we try to do on third down. Dak, he understands coverages, he understands the role of coverages. So, if his pre-snap look is your what you do post snap, he's going to carve you up. So, we have to make sure that we do a good job of being on the bodies of these guys."

On what he feels when he sees the team miss tackles:

"It's not a helpless feeling, don't speak for me. We have to do a better job of it, okay? We have to take one more step to the tackle. We have to make sure we are wrapping; we make sure we're coming up with a body part as we're going. The running and hitting has been there, was there the week before, we did not have the turn backs, the number of turn backs. We only had 12 this week, you know what I'm saying? So, that number was not where it needed to be, but we're going to continue to drill it and like I said, one percent better gets us in the top 10. So, hopefully I can come here and say three weeks from now that, alright, now when you look at the ratio, we're in the top 10 and then we can move forward. We have a lot of games left. And I understand that we let an important game get away from us and it shouldn't have. We should have won this game, especially

on defense at the end right there, but we didn't. And so, we have to make sure that we get off this rollercoaster, and we just play consistent ball.”