

WASHINGTON

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INOVA SPORTS PERFORMANCE CENTER – LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA

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Head Coach Ron Rivera

On QB Alex Smith participating in 11-on-11 drills today:

“It was a very big step because again, it’s back to football. 11-on-11, bodies around you. Sure, we were in shells today, but just the fact that he was doing something with 11 guys on the field at the same time I think is a big step in the direction that we all want to head. We’ll see how things unfold, we’ll see how he does tomorrow, and we’ll go from there.”

On if he’d like to see Smith in a full 11-on-11 drill this week:

“Yes, I would. Again, it’s really just to gauge his confidence in himself. It’s an opportunity for us to gauge where he is in terms of his total movement with 11 players on the field on both sides. So, we’ll see how it goes. The hope is in the next few days we can just continue to progress with him.”

On plays designed for specific receivers:

“When it comes to that, we’re talking about situational football. The playbook is what the playbook is. There is a group of plays for the position. Guys that are in those positions, those are the guys that we have mapped out and said, ‘OK, this is a pool of plays for that position.’ Whether we call that position the X to Z, the F, the Y, the U or the H, those are the plays that are for it. Now, when [RB] J.D. [McKissic] comes in the game in situational football, there is a set for his specific position. With guys like [WR] Steven Sims and the tight end position with [TE] Logan [Thomas], [WR] Terry [McLaurin], there’s plays that are designed for that position. But, when those guys are specifically in that position, you’ll see those plays. So, to answer the question in a roundabout way, we do have them. We do have them for specific guys, but we do have them for the specific position itself.”

On using tight ends as opposed to full backs in the offense:

“Well, we had an actual full back—I apologize for not remembering his name [Michael Burton]—that was on our roster, but he decided to move on. So, because of that and not really feeling good about any other guys that were out there in terms of working a contract out, we decided that we could do the same thing with tight ends that we’ve done in the past. We did in Carolina. We had the tight end play what we called the F position, which is fine. Chris Manhertz did that for a number of years, Alex Armah was kind of a hybrid tight end-full back guy that did it for a number of years as well. So, we have guys that fit that description, they just happened to be what we call tight ends or Y’s.”

On what he is looking for in players for the 53-man roster:

“The first, obviously, is who are our top 35-40 players? And then, who are the primary rotational backup guys and then who fills up the rest of the roster? That’s what we’re trying to determine right now. What we’re looking at based on some things is, do guys belong in a rotation? Guys that belong in rotations are guys that are definitely going to make the football team. Primary backups, those are guys that are going to get an opportunity to make the football team. Those guys that are special teams players and specialists, they’ll make it if they stand out. That’s what we’re looking for. We’re trying to watch those things very closely. The hard part, obviously, will be the special teams, trying to determine that. But the thing you’re looking for with those guys is, do they separate themselves in practice from the rest of the herd? You know what I’m saying? The rest of the group of guys, is this guy standing out as a special teams player? From that group of positional players, for instance

linebackers, is that fifth, sixth or seventh guy standing out from the rest of the guys? Is that why the guy gets an opportunity to make the football team? That's what we're looking for, guys who separate themselves from the rest."

On if any players have separated themselves so far:

"Yeah, there are a few. There's a couple guys that we like. Again, we'll see what happens in the next few days. We've mapped out a couple things in practice for the next few days. You guys will see it tomorrow to try to give us an opportunity to determine who's standing out and who's separating."

On Monday's stadium practice:

"Actually, as I said, tomorrow will really be the thing that [reporters] will be looking for. You guys will see it tomorrow. But, we're sticking with the plan on Monday. Monday will really be a shelled practice. It's really more about the operations more so than anything else. Everybody gets comfortable at the stadium. One thing that we've noticed in the past is that when you do practice at the stadium, the first time you're in there the velocity, everything ramps up. Coming out of pads you typically get a few injuries that you don't want. But it happens because they're in the stadium, they're fired up, the intensity level spikes. The intensity level spikes a little bit and you have to be careful. Really, that's what we're doing. We're really looking at the operations on Monday to make sure we're comfortable, we understand where we need to be on our old field. We'll work the coaches up in the boxes so they get used to the communications. We'll do our pregame warmup like we would during a regular season game. So, we're really trying to map that out when it comes to Monday. But again, tomorrow will be an important day as far as us as coaches judging our football team."

On how C Keith Ismael has adjusted:

"He's done a nice job. We've put a lot on Keith. We've had him not just playing the center position but playing both guards. Again, we talk about position flex, and he's showing that he can do both things. He's made some mistakes and he's had some mental breakdowns at times. But, with the amount of volume we've put on him, he's handled it very well."

On if veterans will have an edge to make the final roster:

"They will. That's the unfortunate part, you have to really be honest, you have to be really thoughtful and you have to go back to the moments that you created in practice situations to see in comparison. But, I have a feeling that people will tend to lean toward the veteran because they know what they have. They know they have a tried player that's been through these moments."

On if Smith's rotation in practice is important:

"No. You're going to put him with the first group or with the second group or with the third group. That doesn't matter. That doesn't play into it. Right now, it's just about finding out where Alex is."

On if they have a set role for RB Antonio Gibson:

"No, we have a plan for him. I know we haven't showed you guys the whole plan, and that's a part of the secret we're trying to keep going into the regular season. But, Antonio's a very versatile young man, a solid football player. I told you guys the other day we've put a lot on his plate. We really have, and he's handled it very well. We'll continue to do that. We'll continue to do things that we're going to try to put him in the best position to help us, try to put him in a position to have success as a football player. There's a lot that we can do with a young man like him."

On WR Antonio Gandy-Golden's progression:

"He's doing well. He's a bright young man, he understands the game, he knows the nuances. His biggest thing obviously will be about learning and understanding and growing into his role. He's got a good skillset that fits

into what we want to do. We believe we know where we can use him and utilize his skillset. He's a guy that's just got to continue to learn and grow."

On Gandy-Golden sitting out of practice today:

"He got hurt yesterday. Nothing serious. It'll just be a matter of time before we get him back out on the field."

On moments he gets fired up in practice:

"I will do things when I believe they are appropriate. So, whether they're in the moment or they're strategic, they're always heartfelt. I'm not trying to be animated for the thrill of it. I'm trying to make sure I get a point across to our young men about the things that have to happen in terms of giving us an opportunity to be a good football team. The other thing too I've learned, is you don't do it all the time because eventually it falls on deaf ears. So when I do it, I do it to get a point across."

On if any of his former coaches' fiery moments stuck with him:

"Oh, yeah. But your style is your own. If you're genuine your players will know, and if you're fake they'll know."

On WR Dontrelle Inman:

"He's shown us that he's right there in the conversation as we continue to go forward. He's done a nice job. He's a veteran guy that's done a lot of good things. One thing that does catch my eye is how he handles and works with our young guys. He's put his arm around A.G.G. and the other guys and has really talked with them about how to go forward and his approach. Dontrelle's been a welcoming addition. Again, he's competing just like everybody else."

On if they're still evaluating at left guard:

"Most certainly. You don't want to do like people say 'ready, fire, aim.' You want to make sure you get a chance to really think about the decision you make before you really decide. So, we've really kind of thought about it, worked through it and kind of said: 'You know what, let's continue to work through these combinations of guys and really find the best combination and we'll go from there.'"

On if G Wes Schweitzer will have a better chance as a veteran:

"Most certainly. That's some of the benefits having been in the league for a number of years and having had success. We know what you're capable of. Really, he came in and he was in great shape and was doing some good things and then he got nicked and had to step aside for a few days. Now he's back, we'll get him going again and we'll see how he responds."

On what to look for in tomorrow's practice:

"Just really the competition, how they compete against one another. Again, it's something we have to do—we talked about it earlier when you guys asked—we have to create these types of moments and get them as close as we can to live-action football as possible and again not get anybody hurt. So, we have to do this, and we have to do it very smartly."

On what they are seeing from the receivers:

"I think we're seeing what we want to see, but we are seeing what we need to see. We are seeing some of these guys start to separate themselves. We are seeing some of these guys start to understand, and that's a big part of it. Again, not having the type of offseason you'd like, there are a lot of guys that are just starting to get it. You're starting to see the lightbulb go on. You're starting to see them play faster, and to us that's indicative of guys starting to understand and know what they're supposed to be doing on the football field, and that bodes well for them, and for us for that matter."