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Linebackers Coach Steve Russ

On LB Kevin Pierre-Louis's development:

"I thought he got better from Week 1 to Week 2. That's always good to see. As a coach, you always want to see your guys improve from Week 1 to Week 2. I say quite a bit: 'You're getting better, you're getting worse. You don't stay the same.' I really enjoyed watching him play. He plays with a lot of energy. He was able to get in on a lot of plays last week, which was great to see as well. What I was happy the most with was that I thought he improved from Week 1 to Week 2."

On if he has specific talking points about Cleveland's run game for the linebackers:

"Absolutely. Get downhill and you've got to be able to hit these thick. You've got to be able to throw your uppercuts, roll your hips and you've got to be able to run your feet on contact. These guys—they love contact. They see contact. They get up into their crease, that hole, very quickly. We've got to do a great job of making sure when we make contact, we're doing it on our terms. We want to be able to get these guys thick. You hit them on the edges and they're going to get a lot of leaky yards. We've got to be able to employ our power. Like I said, roll our hips by throwing our uppercuts and—again—running your feet on contact is going to be key with these guys because they don't like to go down on first hits."

On if the game has evolved to fit Pierre-Louis's skillset:

"Well, I think bigger, stronger, faster is always what any football coach and any football team is after. I think you've got to have a great blend. You can't just be fast and not powerful. You do run into teams that will spread you out and go four-wide, five-wide and do what I like to call 'play basketball on grass.' Then you get guys like who we're playing this week with [Browns RB Nick] Chubb and [Browns RB Kareem] Hunt, and now all of a sudden those guys that are just little jitterbugs—you've got to tackle these people. You play [RB Derrick] Henry from the Titans, [Buccaneers RB Leonard] Fournette—there are big backs in this league and there are teams in this league that still play big-boy football. It's not like specific conferences in the NFL like in college. Like the Big 12 for instance is kind of wide open. The SEC is a little bit more grind-it-out and they're going more wide open. I think in the NFL you get a bit more balanced. We want guys that can be able to move in space. You have to because everybody on third down—at least on third down, two-minute, must-pass situations—is doing things like that. So, it's great to have guys that have a skillset like that that can run, but you've still got to earn your money as a linebacker making sure you stop that run as well."

On how Pierre-Louis is performing as a starter:

"He's growing into it. He's been in the league a long time. He only has a few starts under his belt. The one thing I see from KPL is improvement, and that's what we want to see. We want to see guys that continue to improve, continue to get comfortable being out there in our system and with the guys that he's out there playing with and just turn it loose. Turn it loose, go out there and have fun, play hard and good things will happen. That's where I think he's headed and I'm going to be excited to see what he can turn into and continue to get better. We're just looking for steady improvement. That's what we're looking for. Go out there and be consistent and be steady and just get a little bit better each day."

On what makes the Browns run game difficult to contain:

"I think it goes back to when I played with the Broncos. It was Mike Shanahan and Alex Gibbs. This is where this offense comes from and it stood the test of time. [Vikings offensive coordinator] Gary Kubiak has had great success with it. Obviously [Browns Head Coach Kevin] Stefanski has had success with it. [49ers Head Coach] Kyle Shanahan out in San Fran is having success with it. It's that stretch run game coupled with the counter schemes coupled with good people and it's coupled with good coaching and they're committed to it. Oh by the way, they've got a good quarterback and good weapons at wide receiver. That helps too. They do a nice job with their boots and their play actions and they come off of it. Really, it starts up front with that line and those backs and that scheme they have is very, very good. I think it's a mix of things. They've got a great scheme. I think they're coached well and they've also got great players. So, I think it's a little bit of everything."

On the challenge for the linebackers:

"Well, it's our challenge every week. We've got to make sure we've got great fundamentals. Every week starts with great fundamentals. It starts with our key reads, being able to get the right key. Run-pass keys, what type of run key is it—you've got to do a great job with key. After that, you've got to be able to use great fundamentals with your footwork with how you get downhill, how you use your hands, block destruction and using what we call 'our radar,' our football instincts of knowing where the ball is going. Where is it cutting back? Is it bouncing? Etcetera. But the one thing that we have to do is we have to play fast. We've got to be able to play fast. We've got to be able to dictate and that starts up front. What they do up front certainly helps what we do as linebackers. We're ultimately linked together. We've just got to play really good team defense and I think we'll be in really good shape."

On what has surprised him about the linebackers:

"I don't think I've really had any surprises. I think surprises come when you have a lot of preconceived notions. I try not to come into a new situation like this with preconceived notions. So, I just kind of focus on the here and the now and trying to get these guys better every day. I wouldn't say I've had a lot of surprises any way shape or form. We have standards, we have expectations that we all hold each other to in how we go about working in our meeting room, in our individual drills and in practice, how we study film, the whole deal. Everybody's done that. I guess that's not a surprise to me. I really haven't had any. That's a good question, but I don't think I've had any."

On if LB Cole Holcomb's injury will stunt his development:

"No, I don't think it'll stunt anything. Obviously we want him out there as much as possible. Most of the time in the NFL, you're going to have some stretches where you're going to be banged up. In this league it happens. I think we'll be able to get him back out there fairly quickly, I hope. He'll be able to pick right back up with it. I think when guys do stunt a little bit, it's because they're not staying mentally engaged. Cole is as far as that as he could be. He's very mentally engaged in the meetings, out there in practice he's taking mental reps. That's when you have a chance to make sure that stunting that you referred to doesn't happen. He's done a wonderful job of staying engaged. We always say: 'If you stay ready, you don't have to get ready.' It's a heck of a lot easier to stay locked in than to try to get back locked in. He's done a good job with that and I don't think it'll hurt him that much at all."

On LB Jon Bostic's downhill blitzing ability:

"That's a good question. Probably all of the above. I think it's a product of him doing a really nice job, obviously. But those guys up front making sure they're hitting it hard and fast—it is nice. It's nice to have guys that can be able to do those kinds of things. [Defensive coordinator] Jack [Del Rio]'s scheme that we have here allows linebackers to be able to play that way as well. It's nice. It's the old Sun Tzu phrase: 'When you can attack everywhere and defend everywhere, your strategy is complete.' That's what we're always trying to come up with, is a way to be able to do that. It's nice to be able to have flexibility in your package to do a lot of different things. I think that you kind of see that as you watch our film."

On where he saw Pierre-Louis's growth from Week 1 to Week 2:

"Just watching him play. He was around the ball more, I think. I think he's a little bit more comfortable with some of his key reads. I just see an overall—I don't like to divulge too many things—but I just saw an overall let's just say an overall improvement in his game. He'll be the first to tell you there's things he wants to clean up and we're going to work on, don't get me wrong. The growth curve has got to be constant. It's just nice to see guys improve from Week 1 to Week 2. So, I think he did that without diving into specifics. I try not to do that too much."

On Bostic playing every snap:

"I think if you look at most teams, most teams have a linebacker that's going to be out there all the time because somebody's got to have the helmet mic. That's not something that there's two guys out there where you can share the duty or you can quick swap helmets in between plays. So, that's part of it there's no doubt about that. You've got to be able to have that communication because in this day and age the signals get stolen. It just gets hard especially when people are going up-tempo and things like that. You've got to be able to have that communication from Jack onto the field with the helmet mic. If you look at that, I think a lot of times you're going to have one guy in the NFL that does that quite a bit. That's probably the biggest reason for that especially with all the defensive packages that we have to play to counter all the different offensive packages that you get from each team."

On how Bostic has handled quarterbacking the defense:

"I think he's done a really nice job. Part of it is you have to have a cool head. If you're looking like the guy that directs planes on the aircraft carrier and you're doing all these kinds of stuff, that can get difficult because you're being very demonstrative. At the same time, you're trying to help other people but you've got to do your job as well. So, learning how to be able to communicate efficiently, effectively, calmly and clearly is very, very important. I think he's done a nice job handling that so far. Again, that's an expectation that happens that way. Otherwise you're not going to have a chance to function as a defense."