

# WASHINGTON

## FOOTBALL TEAM, EST. 1932

INOVA SPORTS PERFORMANCE CENTER - LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA

December 10, 2020

### **Head Coach Ron Rivera**

#### **On scouting DE Montez Sweat out of college:**

“We liked him as well when it came down to him and [Panthers LB] Brian [Burns]. When you sit there and look at the guys that we were looking at you said: ‘Gosh, this guy’s got the skillset. So does this guy.’ We were going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. I think the one deciding factor was the quickness. It’s crazy because they’re so similar. They really are. They’re so similar in terms of style. As far as Montez is concerned, growth, absolutely. Absolutely. I think the addition of [DE] Chase Young to our defensive front has really helped Montez because those two are peas in a pod. They work together, they hang out together, they talk about football together. That’s one of the things you like is that you do see maturity and growth.”

#### **On teaching batting balls down:**

“It’s about understanding when to get your hands up, how to get your hands up. Some guys have a knack and a feel for it. Other guys, you have to work on it and make it become second nature. I think it’s one of those things where these guys have a good feel for it and understand how to do it. We do work on it. We do some basic drills about that stuff. Some guys have a true knack, especially the taller guys.”

#### **On RB Antonio Gibson’s turf toe:**

“It is concerning. We’ll see how it plays out the next two days and see how it is. It is complicated for a running back because he’s got to plant, cut, turn. I think the big toe—that’s where his power and energy that he runs with comes up. We’re hoping for the best. He’s had a couple of good days with the trainers. We’ll see how he is tomorrow morning.”

#### **On the team playing with more confidence:**

“Well, you see stuff like fourth-down plays, goal-line plays that guys are making. You see them just playing with energy, playing with speed, playing with quickness and coming to the sideline and talking about what’s going on out there and being positive about things. That’s the huge plus about winning, obviously, but playing well.”

#### **On facing 49ers T Trent Williams:**

“I’m not going to get into that. I’m going to talk about our players. Trent’s a very good football player. He’s done a great job for them. We’ll see how it goes. That’s why you play them on Sunday.”

#### **On Head Athletic Trainer Ryan Vermillion:**

“Ryan is our ICO, our Infectious Control Officer. He’s done a heck of a job. Knock on wood we continue to maintain where we are right now. He’s a stickler on it. It’s been amazing when something comes across, they’ll call him immediately. They’ll call him at 2 o’clock, 3 o’clock, 4 o’clock in the morning. He has to deal with it, and he does. He does a great job with that. As far as a trainer, he’s been doing it for such a long time. Almost as long as I’ve been in the league he’s been a trainer, basically. So, he’s got a lot of experience. He understands what’s going on medically with the players. He’s a guy that listens. He understands how to treat guys. He tries to get to know them beyond being a quote unquote patient. A player that comes in with an injury, he’s got to understand that person, that person’s mentality, that person’s psyche and try to help them through these things.

I've been with him 10 years and had an opportunity to see him work. I just know that this guy is one of those trainers that gets it and understands. He's open, he works with people and he's a guy that has done a great job, especially this year with all the COVID stuff and then having to work with people. There's been a lot of pressure on him and a lot of stress for him. The thing that I like is that he works through those situations and has done the best job he can to get our guys back on the field. We've got a good staff. We really do. It's one of the things I talked about changing when I got here, what was going on downstairs in the training room. I think we have a good crew of doctors; we really do. They're really very highly respected from Dr. [Anthony] Casolaro to Dr. [Robin] West. I think we've got a good team down there."

**On DT Jonathan Allen being named Washington's Nominee for Walter Payton NFL Man of the Year:**

"On the field, you see a guy that competes and gives it all he has and does a nice job with his leadership, you really do. He's learned, he's grown within our scheme and is playing some good football right now for us. Off the field, I know he has a passion for the military like I do because he grew up in the military. He understands how important it is to give back. That's the thing that I really appreciate. I was fortunate enough to play with Walter Payton and know him off the field as well. On the field, he was a tremendous teammate. But off the field, Walter was tremendous, very giving with his time and dove into things. So, when I see players that emulate what he does, it's kind of cool. It really is. I've been fortunate to have [LB] Thomas Davis [Sr.], who was the Walter Payton Man of the Year one year because of who he is. You look at guys like Jonathan, and you know why he's our representative. I know they've had some really good ones here the last couple years. I'm just proud of the fact that we have guys that give back to our community."

**On WR Antonio Gandy-Golden returning to practice:**

"That's the thing, you're exactly right, we've got to watch him, continue to put him in situations. Right now, he's doing some scout team stuff and he looked great. He really did. That big, sleek body out there moving and going fast—that was pretty exciting. Now as we start going through this week and it's a short week, we'll probably have to wait till next week to really get a good look at him and incorporate him into some of the things we're doing on the offense. Right now, it's getting his feet wet and getting back into football shape and trying to get mentally in football shape in terms of what we're doing and how we're doing it. But he did look good. He really did."

**On preventing a lull after a three-game winning streak:**

"Well, that's one of the things I was concerned with this morning, when we first started practice. I know you guys saw me huddling them up really quick beforehand. It's a little something I learned with talking to John Madden. After big wins, you can't pick up where you left off. You just can't because if you do, you're going to miss the little details. I told the guys we have to pay attention to the little things, we have to pay attention to the details, start from the bottom and prepare ourselves for this week's game. I told them: 'Hey, congratulations on last week, but let's focus in on this week. We've got to get past it.' That was honestly one of my concerns that we might have a little bit of a hangover. We're trying to get these guys past that and get them to understand that what we did, how we played Monday night, doesn't guarantee we're going to do it again this week. We've got to do it how we did the previous week. We've got to practice, prepare and get ourselves ready to go out and play."

**On practicing small details in walk-throughs:**

"When things are slowed down you can see things develop. Now, you have to make sure as you're going through it that the picture that's been given by the show team is good so the guys can see if we're ready to run that play. It's one of our outside plays, and as we go through it, our guys have to see what could potentially happen like if there's going to be a guy running through it, how do we come off this one block and get this block. Those are the little details that you can see better when you slow the tempo down. It's not necessarily a walk-through as much as we've slowed the tempo down to where we can see these things better. Then what

happens is it culminates at the end of the week. We put the helmets and the shells on, and we go full speed. We've got up-tempo, and now we see game speed. We're getting the timing down for the receivers, for the DBs, for the quarterbacks, for whoever. Now we're showing the blocking scheme for the defensive line. The offensive line, now they're getting a chance to see how these things will go at up-tempo, at game speed or as close as we can to game speed. What we try to do is we try to give them a chance to really mentally get into the game. The thing we also do is we really try to take care of our bodies at this time of year and have them play and feel like they're fresher, so we don't have guys going into the weekend with their hips still bothering them or their hamstrings tight. I've done it in the past in Carolina where, at the end of the year, we try to take care of these guys. It's paid off. So, hopefully we can continue that and see what happens."

**On a team playing with belief:**

"I think the thing about the belief is that you have something that you're working toward. We have a group of guys that have a lot of talent, and they believe in what they're doing, and they have an objective. Their intent is to go out and win and to go out and play to win. Their hope and belief is that they want to win and they can win. I think wanting to makes them even better as opposed to have to. That's kind of the thing our guys are getting into. They want to go out and they want to play well. They like the feeling after the game of winning. They like the feeling of what it's like to be on a three-game winning streak, to be competing for first place in the division that gives them an opportunity to have a chance to get into the playoffs. That's what's important. That's what I think, to me, is the big thing. That's why we're getting the attitude we're getting. That's why we're getting the effort we're getting. These guys have that in front of them."

**On if he believes in momentum:**

"Yeah, because what happens is the momentum is created by the players and their attitude. They make a couple things happen, they do some really good things and it's: 'This can happen. Let's go get it.' Their energy levels increase and they believe it. That's created by the team by making plays."

**On how Coach Mike Ditka handled success:**

"The biggest thing was he always warned us. He always warned us: 'You guys are building this up too much. Just be careful, guys. They build you up too much and put you on that pedestal and then they knock you down.' He did. He used to always say: 'Careful what they write, careful what they say, guys. You don't want to lose the focus. Let's stay focused.' He did emphasize that. He didn't want to get us caught up in what was going on or what was being written about us. He wanted us to stay focused. That was a big part of it, was that staying humble is important."

**On if he was apprehensive to put QB Alex Smith in:**

"I was. Each time he would take another step, he'd take another step, take another step, take another step and you'd watch him. To be honest, I think I was going slow to watch him and observe. Every time he went in for a drill, it was up. Every time he went in for a scrimmage period, I was really, truly watching him. Then I watched him on tape, and I could see his progression getting better and better and more and more confident. What really happened was he came and saw me, and we had a great conversation. His desire and his want to be out there, he wanted more. He felt he needed more to see. Just hearing that from him, I put him into a position where things were about as close to live as it could be. Guys were all around him, clawing in front of him and knocking and bumping into him and he just kept going. He kept going and kept going. I kind of got more and more confident in him, and I could see because his confidence was growing. I think that's what really helped me in terms of being willing to put him out there."

**On what 49ers Head Coach Kyle Shanahan does schematically:**

"I think he's got talented players because they've done a great job in San Francisco. I have the same feelings as well, I have a lot of respect for what he's done, for what he's accomplished. He's a really good play-caller, and

he has a knack for getting into a rhythm. When he's in a rhythm, I think they're as hard to stop as anybody. What happens is, in my opinion—if they can get you playing sideways, you're in trouble. I believe that as opposed to getting up field and getting vertical and getting after the quarterback, getting up field and being disruptive as far as their blocking schemes are concerned. They've got tremendous playmakers that you've got to account for whether it's the wide receivers, the tight ends or the running backs. They use everybody. They just don't sit there and say: 'OK, we're going to throw the ball to this guy.' No. They've got enough receivers that they mix it up. They've got tight ends that can make plays. They've got backs that are dynamic. It's a very well put together group. I know they've had a lot of injuries this year. They're starting to get guys back. You see how scary they can be as they play. That last quarter of football I thought was pretty good. I thought that first quarter of football was pretty good. I've got a lot of admiration for what he's done. I had to put up with him when he was in Atlanta getting after us. Last year in San Francisco, he did a heck of a job against Carolina.”