

# WASHINGTON

## FOOTBALL TEAM, EST. 1932

INOVA SPORTS PERFORMANCE CENTER - LOUDOUN COUNTY, VA

January 4, 2021

### **Head Coach Ron Rivera**

#### **On making a decision to play WR Terry McLaurin against the Eagles:**

“What happened was on Thursday—I believe it was Thursday—he had told us that he had felt it turning. We practiced outside, and so while we were practicing, I noticed him on the other side of the field on one of the other practice fields running sprints. I saw him run a 100-yard dash, for whatever reason. I knew he was playing. That’s all it took.”

#### **On McLaurin practicing this week:**

“Well, if he plays like he did last week, he doesn’t have to practice until walk-through on Saturday. I’m just kidding, relax, OK [laughs]. I’m just kidding. We’ll see. I’m pretty confident that he’ll be a little further along than he was last week. We should have a couple good days of practice, so I do anticipate seeing him out there in a limited role and taking specific reps more so than anything else. We’ll have a plan for Terry as we’ll have for [QB] Alex [Smith] as we’ll have for [RB] Antonio Gibson as well.”

#### **On facing Buccaneers QB Tom Brady:**

“I’ll say that with a straight face—it’s another opponent [laughs]. No, it’s Tom Brady. Let’s be realistic about who we’re playing. The dude is having another phenomenal year again. He’s been hot. Maybe we’ll get lucky and catch him down. But right now, he’s playing really good football. We’ll see. I promise you though, we’re going to show up on Saturday night.”

#### **On if teams create defensive units to help face true pocket passers:**

“Well, not necessarily just this game, but games like these. I think there’s more than enough games like these. That’s why you have the front that you have. To me, in all honesty, going back to my experiences in 2015 and then a couple years ago doing a little research on pressure and the importance of interior pressure combined with edge pressure and how much it impacts—that’s why you do it. When I was in Carolina, we had one of the best pocket passers that we competed against twice a year in [Saints QB] Drew Brees. We had to have a rush. We went out and drafted [former Panthers DT] Star Lotulelei and [Panthers DT] Kawann Short and coupled them with some outside edge speed that we had in [former Panthers DEs] Mario Addison and Charles Johnson. We were able to get to the quarterback. Getting here and having a chance to see what San Francisco had done the last couple years and then looking at this roster as I had told you guys before then just looking at that youth and the potential of that youth and knowing that, if we developed the youth properly, we’d develop something good. I think we’re starting to get that. I mean, we’re still developing. They’re still learning. They’re still growing. But their potential is most certainly on display.”

#### **On if he was concerned they would not reach the playoffs:**

“Yeah, to be honest with you. We played two games without our starting quarterback, without our best wide receiver, without our best running back combination healthy. Honestly, nobody cared. That’s the truth of the matter. No one cared two weeks ago. Nobody cared a week ago. So, the concern was there. Alex came in and did what we hoped Alex would do, and low and behold we got into the playoffs. But, yeah, I was concerned to be honest with you.”

**On the Eagles benching QB Jalen Hurts:**

“Well, honestly and truthfully, it honestly doesn’t matter. You play whoever is out there. I’m not going to apologize for winning. Apparently, that’s what everybody wants me to do is apologize for winning. I’m not going to. You play the game as it’s set up. Nobody complained when Pittsburgh did what they did last night against Cleveland. I mean, come on. This is just the way it is. We got into the playoffs. We’re 7-9. I’ve been 7-8-1 in the playoffs. I was on an 8-8 team that was in the playoffs. You don’t apologize for getting into the playoffs. You apologize for losing in the playoffs, at least I believe you do. But you don’t apologize for getting in. It’s been a hard role for us. Nobody seems to care about that. Nobody seemed to care two weeks ago when we didn’t have some of our best players. Nobody cared last week when we didn’t have them. So, why should we be concerned if a coach decides to do something he believes is best for his team? That’s what I think people need to understand. This is just the way the game is played and the way a lot of things happen. A lot of people are happy about it, and a lot of people aren’t happy about it. That’s just tough. That’s the way it is. So many things have happened in this world that are tough and are hard. This is just the game that we’re playing, and we’re going to play it as it comes to us. I’m not going to apologize. I’m not. That’s just the way it is.”

**On how his treatment and Smith’s recovery helped to build a mindset for the team:**

“I think it’s helped. I do. Especially when you see what Alex has gone through and just his desire and drive to get back and the joy and thrill he gets from playing. If you don’t feel that from a guy, especially at his age, his experience, his situation and circumstances—that’s a great example. That, to me, is why you play the game. Just to see it, just to see the thrill that he gets out of it. It’s been very inspirational for me to watch him. It really has. I’d like to imagine that in some way what I’ve gone through plays a little part in this as well. You have to be touched by seeing those things. I think just trying to be an example is important.”

**On moments he witnessed Smith’s teammates being inspired by him:**

“I overheard it during training camp when Alex would do something and you’d see guys go: ‘Man, gosh, just look at him. Man, he’s having fun. He’s excited.’ I heard that. What’s even more crazy was after that show they did [E:60] did, ‘Project 11,’ I believe it was called—you could hear the players talk about it. They would be going: ‘Oh, are you kidding? He loves the game. That’s why he’s out there.’ That, to me, is a tangible thing that the guys can learn from. If you don’t learn from it, maybe you don’t deserve to be here. This is an opportunity that you’re not just given. You earn it. You’re not entitled to it. You have to earn it. You really do. For him to work his way back, that, to me tells the whole story.”

**On videos of DE Chase Young getting excited to face Brady after the Eagles game:**

“It’s going to be bulletin board material, let’s be honest about that. They’ll have fun with it. You’ve got to chalk it up to youthful exuberance, but that’s who Chase is. I do cringe, but at the same time I smile at it because he loves playing the game. I think that’s what it’s all about. Like I talked about earlier with Alex, Alex loves playing the game. I want guys that love playing professional football on this team, not guys that love being professional football players. Do you feel the difference? Can you feel the difference about wanting to play the game, loving playing the game, and not just showing up in the uniform and looking good? That’s what I want. That’s who Alex is. That’s who Chase is. That’s the kind of guy we want on our football team.”

**On his mentality as an underdog this week:**

“The old saying goes: ‘All you need is a chance.’ That’s what we have is a chance. It’s interesting because there’s been a lot of upset victories throughout time. No bigger or greater upset or victory than David or Goliath. So, who knows? That’s why we’ll show up on Saturday night.”

**On what he learned from reading about Winston Churchill and how he fosters a winning mentality:**

“Really, just the never-die attitude that Winston Churchill had. It was one of the speeches he gave to the House of Commons about how they’ll fight anywhere. They’ll fight on the beaches, they’ll fight on the streets, they’ll

fight till their last gurgling breath of death. That, to me, is inspiring. I really, truly appreciate reading about that stuff just so I understand and I'm learning that, hey, anything is possible if you're willing to commit to it and fight. As far as fostering the winning mentality, I think the first part of it is trying to get them to take ownership for themselves and then others around them and getting everybody to understand that we have a standard. If we're below the standard, then we've got to raise it. I try to treat everybody like adults. That's the other thing, too. I try not to embarrass anybody. I try to pull them aside and give them a word or two to help bolster their confidence. We've got some young guys that have got a lot to learn. If we're not patient with them and not giving them the right direction and not telling them what the standard is and then holding them to that standard, we're not giving them a chance to succeed. If we're not disciplining them and making them understand they have to be accountable for their actions, then we have to hold everybody else accountable as well, starting with ourselves—then we're not holding ourselves true to what we're trying to teach. Everybody always says: 'Why did you say what you said against Pittsburgh?' I made a decision that didn't work out. I wanted to make sure the players knew that I owned it. At the same time, I apologized to the defense at halftime just so they knew I know I messed up. They were able to have my back, and that was huge. By following up on the things that I'm preaching or constantly using as examples, that's what I have to do. I have to hold myself accountable, too. By doing that, I think we're showing the guys that—at least I hope we're showing the guys—that talk's not cheap. I'm trying to be true to my word. It truly does mean that everybody has to be held accountable, myself included."

**On what might concern him with Smith in practice this week:**

"It's interesting, I haven't had a chance to talk with [Head Athletic Trainer Ryan Vermillion] RV yet. I'll talk to Ryan and ask him if he's had a chance to talk to Alex and see where he is after yesterday. It'll be interesting to see where he is, and then I'll probably be able to determine where we're headed from there."

**On what he would say if someone told him they would win the NFC East at the beginning of the season:**

"If you gave me the scenario where everything else is the same, honestly, I wouldn't have blinked. The reason being is because at Week 5, I believed we had a chance at 1-3. So, I just think that if situations are equal, why not us? I think that's really kind of how I drew that conclusion was: why not us? Now, if we were 2-7 and there were a couple teams that were 7-2, then I think you're crazy. But all things being equal, all we need is a chance. That's what I believed we had at Week 5 if we did a couple of things. We did a couple of things. I'll be honest, too though, when I looked at that six-game stretch at Week 5—6, 7, 8 and 10—I expected to come out of that at least 3-3 out of those six games. We came out of it 2-4. I was off a little bit, but we had a nice run. We had four in a row that kind of catapulted us and vaulted us into position to win it. Then we kind of survived the last three by winning one of them. That kind of figured. It worked out, but not how I envisioned it, to be honest."

**On if how quickly the culture change is happening surprises him:**

"It doesn't surprise me based on the strong personalities that we have on this team starting with our coaches and then our players. Some of our frontline guys are phenomenal culture guys. You look at the offensive line and it starts with [G] Brandon Scherff and [T] Morgan Moses. Those two guys are just, as they say, 'war daddies.' [TE] Logan Thomas has proven himself to be a guy. Terry McLaurin stepping up as a second-year player. Then the example that Alex is setting for the team as a whole. [RB] J.D. McKissic just being a solid guy. Then you look at the defensive line, and [DT] Jonathan Allen has been as upfront as anybody. But then you throw some youthful exuberance in with Chase, and you think: 'Wow.' [LB] Thomas Davis being around to be able to tell everybody what it's like to be able to play for me along with [LB] Jared Norris, [LB] Jordan Kunaszyk along with a couple other guys that were with me that can tell the other guys: 'Trust Coach. Believe in it. This is what he's talking about.' [CB] Kendall Fuller to be able to talk about playing for a championship team—those types of guys are huge. When you have those kinds of guys that are helping to hold it together, hold guys accountable, hold themselves accountable—that's big. That's huge. We are fortunate that we have some frontline guys that set the example. You take a look at Chase and [DE] Montez [Sweat] and you throw [DE] Ryan Kerrigan with

those two young guys in the mix, and you see Ryan over at the side doing extra reps when the offense is up as he works on his game and sets the example for those young guys. That's what I think is really what's helping the culture change as well is the coaches that are on this staff and the players."

**On moments throughout the season that got the team to where they are:**

"It's interesting, I think a lot of things that had happened that were done on purpose have all kind of led to this. A lot of things were thought out and purposefully done. It's interesting because I've got a couple of veteran coaches that if you watch the way they do things and the way they handle things and the way they challenge players; you really get a better sense. I know you guys only caught training camp and didn't get to see how things continued, but we continued to do those things purposefully as an example of how we do it. That, I think, is one of the things. It's not one or two things, but it's a series of things that continued to happen. We have to be consistent. It's interesting because, you brought up the Detroit game, and then the first Giants game going for two. I just wanted to show the guys that we're playing to win. Especially on the road. That was done on purpose. That's kind of how I see things and believe in them. To be honest with you, I'm going to rethink that and go back and have our analytics guys take a look at exactly what it is now. To be honest, it probably has changed overtime from 15 minutes to 10 minutes. It's probably something that I need to look at. But a lot of things that we do, we do purposefully with a lot of thought and intent."

**On if CB Fabian Moreau's increased snap count was due to the matchup or if he will play more:**

"It was a little bit of both. Fabian just has the misfortune of having a good group of guys around him as well. You look for opportunities to get a guy out there, and sometimes you go beyond it and you don't get him out there as much as you'd like. He's a guy we'd like to play a little bit more. It's the same thing with [LB] Khaleke [Hudson]. Here's a guy that we drafted out of Michigan that played the big nickel position. We had a big nickel in [S] Kam [Curl]. Then we had to move him to safety and we kind of forgot about it. Then talking with [defensive coordinator] Jack [Del Rio], we realized he was a guy that we did. Then, we threw him out there in a little bit of that as well. We have some guys that we want to see a little more from and give more opportunities, but there's only so much in a game."

**On drawing from his experience as a playoff team with a losing record:**

"Hopefully, I can draw on it and it can be positive. But now that everybody's been talking about it, I'll say people start to overlook you. They start to think about their next opponent. Now, because it's going to be brought up and talked about, it'll be a point of discussion from [Buccaneers Head Coach] Bruce Arians. Bruce doesn't miss a lot of things. This will most certainly be something that will be on his radar and he'll put on his team's radar. There are some things that I'll look back on, obviously, that I'll try to draw from."

**On how the underdog mentality plays out throughout the course of a game:**

"It played out because it was talked about. A lot of people said: 'Oh, they shouldn't be in the playoffs. They shouldn't be hosting a game.' Well, you know, we went on a four-game tear and put ourselves in that position to get into the playoffs. We were hot at that point and put ourselves in position. Then we went against Seattle and had a chance to win. It came down to the fourth quarter, but then Seattle bowed its neck and made some plays then ran away with it. But we were competitive all the way through. Again, you get into the playoffs anyway you can. It doesn't matter. What you do when you get into the playoffs, that's up to you. I've been part of a couple of teams now—one was 7-7 and the other was 8-8—both those teams got in because they won the division and both teams won in the first round. In both of those cases, I think just because you got hot at the right time. I think that's important if you play well at the right time. It's just like they say in hockey if you have a hot goalie. In baseball, you have a hot pitcher. That's what you want."

**On his relationship with Coach Arians through their support of diversity in football:**

“Well, first of all, it’s crossed professionally. I have a tremendous amount of admiration of who he is as a coach. I really do. Bruce and I have been on a lot of committees together. We’ve spoken on a lot of things. We’ve tried to support each other in the different things that go on in committee whether it is through diversity or inclusion or just the basic rules of football. Not just the spirit, but the reason the rules are in. Like I said, I have a lot of respect for him both personally and professionally. He, too, has overcome a lot in terms of health as well. I know a lot of people don’t know about that, but Bruce is a warrior as well. I do love matching up against him. I do love reading some of the things he says, too. They’re hilariously honest, and I think that’s great. I do. A lot of times we don’t say what’s on our mind. He has the propensity to do that, which I think is cool.”

**On if they will wear white jerseys at home this week:**

“I think the biggest thing more so than anything else is it’s home. We’ve got to do what is tradition. We’ll go from there.”

**On preparing multiple quarterbacks to play if necessary:**

“I think the biggest thing is because we have a system, and the three quarterbacks we have I think are all interchangeable in their abilities. As we go through it, the game plan will be what it will be. It will be up to those guys to learn and understand what the game plan is. That was the neat thing about being in Carolina, whether [former Panthers QB] Cam Newton was our quarterback, whether [former Panthers QB] Derek Anderson was our quarterback or whether [QB] Taylor Heinicke was our quarterback or [QB] Kyle Allen. It was just one game plan. That I think is great. This is the same way. We’ll have one game plan. These guys will work on it. If Alex can go, Alex will go. If Alex can give us one quarter, two quarters, three, whatever, that’s great. If not, I believe Taylor will be ready. If something happens, I believe [QB] Steven [Montez] will be ready. I just feel confident that we have a good group of guys that will be ready one way or the other. To your point, until I get a chance to find out where Alex is, I can’t really predict anything. Whatever the situation is, we’ll play.”

**On if it was unusual for him to hire Del Rio without them previously coaching together before:**

“Not necessarily. I’ve hired guys because of recommends from certain people. I hired Jack because I went down and spent some time with him. Jack just loves football. I’ve competed against Jack on the collegiate level and the pro level. He’s a tremendous competitor. He’s played for some of the best coaches. He’s coached with some of the best coaches. He’s got a very good lineage, and then he’s made his own. He’s had some success in Jacksonville and had some success in Oakland. I just felt good about it. I felt good about our conversation. It’s paid dividends because, to be quite honest with you, I would have never expected me to deal with what I did. To have a guy as experienced as he is to take over when I needed him to—even when I didn’t need him to, he stepped up. He was great for us this year. Going forward, I expect him to continue to be great. He’s a guy that is a pro. That I think is important as well. It’s also great to have a guy that you can bounce ideas off of. That’s another thing that’s been great. He’ll either suggest something and we’ll talk about it or I’ll go up to him and I’ll say: ‘Hey, I was thinking about this. What do you think?’ And he’ll either agree or disagree and he’ll give me reasons why. A lot of times people will say: ‘Whatever you want to do, Coach.’ Jack will say: ‘No, how about this Coach. You’re right about this. I don’t like this because of this.’ At least I’ll have somebody with some input and somebody with some insight.”