

THE BATTALION

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McNabb says Limbaugh's comments are "shocking"

By Rob Maaddi
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PHILADELPHIA — Donovan McNabb doesn't mind criticism of his performance. He's upset that Rush Limbaugh made his race an issue.

And the Philadelphia Eagles' quarterback says it's too late for an apology from the talk show host, who said the media has overrated McNabb because they want to see a black quarterback succeed.

"It's somewhat shocking to hear that on national TV from him," McNabb said Wednesday. "It's not something that I can sit here and say won't bother me."

Limbaugh insisted Wednesday he had "no racist intent whatsoever." In fact, the conservative commentator said he must have been right; otherwise, the comments would not have sparked such outrage.

Before McNabb led the Eagles to a 23-13 victory over the Buffalo Bills on Sunday, Limbaugh said on ESPN's pregame show that he didn't think McNabb was as good as perceived from the start.

"I think what we've had here is a little social concern in the NFL. The media has been very desirous that a black quarterback do well," Limbaugh said on "Sunday NFL Countdown." "There is a little hope invested in McNabb, and he got a lot of credit for the performance of this team that he didn't deserve. The defense carried this team."

Limbaugh did not back down during his syndicated radio talk show Wednesday. "All this has become the tempest that it is because I must have been right about something," Limbaugh said. "If I wasn't right, there wouldn't be this cacophony of outrage that has sprung up in the sports writer community."

The NFL disclaimed any responsibility. "ESPN knew what it was getting when they hired Rush

Limbaugh," league vice president Joe Browne said. "ESPN selects its on-air talent, not the NFL."

Chris Berman, who anchors the ESPN show, said he did not believe Limbaugh's tone or intent was malicious.

"As cut and dry as it seems in print, I didn't think so when it went by my ears," he said. "I probably should have looked to soften it. We're sorry we upset a guy who got off to a rough start. We don't need to be in the middle of his travails."

McNabb said someone on the show should have taken on Limbaugh. Among the other panelists are former players Michael Irvin and Tom Jackson, both of whom are black.

vide an opposing point of view on the show.

"It is appalling that ESPN has to go to this extent to try to increase viewership," NAACP President Kweisi Mfume said in a statement.

McNabb, who was runner-up for the league MVP award in 2000 and has led the Eagles to two straight NFC championship games, said he has no quarrel with Limbaugh's comment on his ability.

"I know I played badly the first two games," he said.

McNabb got off to the worst start of his career this season and was the NFL's lowest-rated starting quarterback after losses to Tampa Bay and New England. Still, the Eagles are 36-22 in games he has started, including 4-3 in the playoffs.

Limbaugh on Wednesday reiterated that he doesn't think McNabb is a bad player, just that he isn't as good as some media members think he is.

"This is such a mountain out of a molehill," he said. "There's no racism here, there's no racist intent whatsoever."

Seven black quarterbacks started games last weekend. Two other blacks who regularly start, Daunte Culpepper of Minnesota and Michael Vick of Atlanta, were out with injuries.

Asked about Limbaugh's comments, Eagles defensive end N.D. Kalu said: "He speaks well, he's well-read, but he's an idiot." Limbaugh is the radio host of the politically focused "Rush Limbaugh Show," which is syndicated in more than 650 markets worldwide.

He spent most of the 1990s assailing then-President Clinton and now spends Sunday mornings talking football, a job he called "the fulfillment of a dream."

Limbaugh has helped increase the ratings for "Sunday NFL Countdown." ESPN spokesman Dave Nagle said ratings are up 10 percent overall. Sunday's show drew its biggest audience in the regular season since 1996.

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MCNABB

"I'm not pointing at anyone but someone should have said it," McNabb said of the panelists, who also include former quarterback Steve Young. "I wouldn't have cared if it was the cameraman."

Limbaugh was scheduled to be in Philadelphia on Thursday to speak at a broadcast convention. McNabb said he wouldn't be welcome at Eagles' practice.

"I really don't want to see him," McNabb said. "You can say you're sorry all you want, it doesn't matter. It's been said."

The extent of the controversy became more evident when Democratic presidential candidate Wesley Clark urged ESPN to fire Limbaugh. Clark, a retired Army general who entered the race Sept. 17, called the remarks "hateful and ignorant speech."

The NAACP also condemned Limbaugh's remarks, calling them "bigoted and ignorant," and called for the network to fire Limbaugh or at least pro-

Emmitt

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who has any love and drive for the game, that's very disappointing," Coakley said. "You don't want to go out like that, especially if you're the caliber of player he is."

Defensive end Greg Ellis gave Smith the benefit of the doubt, figuring his point just came out wrong.

"Maybe he got ahead of himself and said some things he probably wishes he could take back," he said. "But once it goes in black and white, it's done with. You can't take it back."

Smith was well on his way to becoming the NFL's career rushing leader by the time most of the Cowboys came into the league. They knew the rule: Take it easy on No. 22.

So, even without the added incentive, there already would be the excitement of finally getting to go after him.

"We thudded him up, but it was never full-contact, taking him to the ground," Ellis said. "I'm not going to take it easy on him. He's not going to take it easy on me either. When he tries to cut me, he's going to really be getting after me. I've got to return the favor."

The game also could become a showcase for Troy Hambrick, who lobbied hard to replace Smith last season.

He's getting his wish this season. He started slow, then broke out with 127 yards in a victory over the Jets on Sunday. His 240 yards in three games easily tops Smith's 193 in four games. Hambrick also is averaging 3.9 yards per carry to 3.1 for Smith.

Given the chance to gloat or make a bold prediction, Hambrick opted to avoid saying anything that might wind up on Arizona's bulletin board.

"Put the pressure on the offensive line," he said. "Go find those big guys that weigh 300 pounds, got a little fat hanging off the sides, and tell them they've got to dominate the defensive line this week."

There's one other relationship that will be interesting to see Sunday: How the fans react.

Although Smith was a big reason for three of the Super Bowl banners hanging from the rafters in Texas Stadium, and there's another commemorating his rushing record, the trash comment is still reverberating — especially as much as it's being rehashed this week.

Some fans already were annoyed by his complaints about carries last season. There also was a public-relations mess when he declined an invitation to be inducted into the Texas Sports Hall of Fame in February.

Despite it all, Cowboys owner Jerry Jones is expecting Smith to be cheered, and thinks he should be.

"Those comments this summer are so far overshadowed by what Emmitt has meant and been to our fans and this franchise," Jones said.



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Board Certified Criminal Law

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979-846-1934

e-mail: jim@jimjames.com or Cameron@jimjames.com
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