

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Matt Rhule

Postgame Press Conference



Panthers - 23, Falcons - 16

MATT RHULE: Obviously very proud of our team today. It was a hard-fought, tough victory. I thought all three phases did their part. So really pleased, really proud. Really excited for those guys. A lot of credit to Atlanta. We knew they had their full complement on defense and they were going to give us challenges. We knew on offense that they had weapons, Ridley, Matt Ryan. They were going to challenge us, and they did. It was a great back-and-forth game. And I thought we did a great job in the fourth quarter, really the second half, holding them to field goals on defense and running the ball on offense and making some explosive plays. Really proud of our guys, the amount of guys that stepped up in this game. Burns goes down, I thought he was playing really well. Yetur goes down. D. Jack goes down, and everyone steps up. Justin Burris really proud, excited for him that he made that pick. I thought it was a total team win. That's what we're looking for: A team, a team, a team.

Q. Congratulations. You always talk about playing hard and physical, and a lot of times that applies to defense, but there was a couple of runs out there that seemed to exemplify that. Curtis Samuel, the fourth-quarter run where he carried a bunch of defenders and a few by Mike David. How much does that play into what you really want to build here?

MATT RHULE: It uplifts the team, uplifts the sidelines. Curtis is playing -- I thought that was -- first of all, that was a great check by Teddy. That's not a called play. Teddy checks to that, checks to that run. And it looked like there was a problem on the exchange. You guys probably saw it cleaner than I did. And Curtis found a way. I thought Curtis was really one of the stories today. Made a bunch of great plays. But I think the physicality in the run game, physicality by the O Line, that's what we're looking for. I didn't see the stats. I don't know how many yards we had. Didn't bother to look at it.

Q. In terms of the injuries, can you go over them and

just talk about Jackson and Burns and everything else? And Yetur and maybe even K.K. at the end? Can you give us any update on those? That's four starters on defense.

MATT RHULE: Yeah. I have no update on those guys. They pulled them. They said they were down. I'll let the doctors do their thing and wait till tomorrow. I'll give you guys an updated thing when I know it. Half of the time I don't really know what the true injury is until they get back tomorrow.

Q. When you get those two drives, I mean at the end of the first half, when you get the two-minute drive and at the end of the game where you were able to hold on to the ball for so long. Is that what you want out of your offense to be able to control the game?

MATT RHULE: I want to score. First and foremost, I definitely want to score, but when you can't score, you want to hold the possible as long as possible to give your defense a rest and win the physical battle and keep the ball away from the opposing team. I thought the last drive, I think we started with like five or six minutes. Ran it all the way down to a minute ten. Really could've been aggressive and tried to score a touchdown, but the safe bet, the better bet it seemed like to take it down and kick the field goal. And there was a lot of great runs, a lot of great plays, and a lot of guys made tremendous efforts.

Q. This is the second week in a row you guys did not allow a sack. How much of that is Teddy? How much of that is the line or some combination?

MATT RHULE: I think it's always all of them. It's the guys getting open. When the guys get open quickly, you have a chance to get the ball out of your hand. I thought Mike Davis and those guys picked up blitzes when they came. I think our offensive line, looked like they played well from the field. They brought a lot of exotic blitzes. Teddy got hit sometimes, and he was able to get the ball out of his hands. I think that's one of the things that he's doing a great job of. Most importantly to me is we protected the football. I don't think we had a turnover today. We didn't give the ball away, and anytime you win the turnover battle, you have a chance to win.

Q. You mentioned Justin's interception. That's the



second straight week where the defense has started to give just a little bit and then made a big play. How important are those big momentum-shifting plays and how big was that pick at that point in the game?

MATT RHULE: I think it was huge. They had turned the tide of the game in terms of, you know, we were wearing down, they were moving the ball. I thought they had a great game plan the second half. They didn't panic. They were down two scores. They came out and ran the ball. Offensively, he went three and out twice, and that was a huge, huge, huge play for us. And so, again, J. B., what a tremendous play. And also the plays that led up to it. I think we stopped them twice down there in the goal line area. I think that was third down. Sorry, the game escapes me afterwards. But that's what you need, we needed our players to make plays and they did that.

Q. Teddy had put together a really impressive second quarter. What did you see from him today and the offense overall in that second quarter?

MATT RHULE: I thought we were just aggressive and explosive. We had some down-the-field plays. We got into the two-minute, went down and scored right before the half, which obviously was vital. Again, some of our issues from the past couple of weeks, like third down percentage in the red zone, hurt us on the first two drives, but then we were able to convert the next two. So I thought it was well done by him and by his teammates.

Q. The passing defense really kept Matt Ryan in check, it seemed. Run defense wasn't as good, but what have you seen from this defense as the weeks have gone on?

MATT RHULE: You know, we're just trying to play total team defense. I don't think of it like compartmentalized, like, hey -- it's a give and take. If you put a bunch of guys in the box you open yourself up to the pass. To me it's just guys just reacting and reading their keys. I think the biggest thing is we didn't give up a bunch of explosives. I think we gave up two, one along the sideline that I was just about to challenge and wasn't sure if his foot was in or not. But they did a nice job, him scrambling around, making some plays down the field. We're just getting better. I think when you lose that many guys, your backups step up. To me it's a testament to the way we practice and I say we -- not me, the way the players practice that the twos get a lot of reps and they take it seriously. So you're out there at the end of the game and those guys are playing and playing well. Troy Pride went out there and played the whole game. Rasul played the whole game. Corn Elder makes yet another couple stops. So we're a fourth down play away from ending it without giving up that last field

goal. So it's just practice. It's just the guys getting better. My hope is that we can take a couple of days, catch our breath and hit this game this week with same level of preparation we've had these past weeks.

Q. I want to know from you what word best describes your team for them being able to go 3 and 0 without one of the best players in the NFL. And the second part of that question is who deserves the most credit for this recent run?

MATT RHULE: Well, I think you said the word, it's team. And as such, really no one deserves it. You know, they all deserve it. It's the guys that are playing a jammer on the punt team, running down making a huge tackle to pin them. It's the punter nailing a long punt. It's the field goal protection team. It's perceived as a game of superstars, but it's not. It's all these guys doing their job and working really hard. It's also the coaching staff. It's also the support staff. It's also the people who set the video up. It's everybody just doing their job and trying to do it better today than yesterday. And that's a corny answer, but it's true. We're 3 and 0 or whatever, 3 and 2, 1 and 0 this week or whatever because we're improving. We have to start over again next week and try and be a better team next Sunday than we were this Sunday. And I give that credit to the players. They've bought into the practice. They've bought into the work ethic, the preparation, and I think it's showing up on game day.

Q. How would you describe what you're seeing from Mike Davis and the way that he's running the ball?

MATT RHULE: I think he's running it with tremendous physicality. He's not getting tackled by the first tackler. I think we've found some runs that he feels really comfortable with. And it's great second effort, great yards after contact. And that's the mark of a good back. He's also doing a good job catching the football. Great situation awareness, getting down, not going out of bounds at the end of the game. Mike's a pro and he's playing like it.

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