

# Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

Tuesday, January 19, 2021

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

**Arthur Blank**

**Arthur Smith**

**Rich McKay**

Weekday Press Conference



ARTHUR BLANK: So today is the start of a new era for us. We have obviously a new coach and new general manager, and we'll have a chance to visit with our new general manager in an hour or so, but we are thrilled to have Coach Smith with us today. I would say our search was extensive.

I think we interviewed maybe seven candidates, maybe more than that. It was clear from the outset when we went through the process that there were a lot of very qualified coaches this year. I would say the most that I've ever seen personally in the past, so I'm really happy about that and I think that's progress for the lead and progress for these young men.

And we are thrilled that the No. 1 choice we made was Coach Smith from Tennessee and we went through a virtual interview with him that was extensive, a lot of reference checking, a lot of conversations, he was kind enough to come to Atlanta and we did an in-person interview, as well. He has great background, great credentials. He had a ton of experience at Tennessee.

I would say this, and I don't know whether Arthur would agree or not, but you know, the fact that he's been at Tennessee and there's been three coaching changes there and in each case they have chosen not only to keep Coach Smith but move him up the pipeline and move him up the ladder in terms of his responsibility is probably a record in the NFL in 101 years. That very rarely happens. It's not often coaching staffs even selectively are retained, usually not, but to go through three iterations of coaching changes and to have Coach Smith in each case to be asked to not only stay on but to take on additional responsibility I think speaks well for himself, and so we're excited about that.

I think particularly, we're excited about what he's done with the offense the last two years in Tennessee and you guys

will have plenty of opportunity to ask him all the questions you would like to. This is not really -- I'll answer the questions I can or I should but this is really about you getting to know our new coach but we are extraordinarily excited to have him in Atlanta.

So with that let me just open it up to questions you might have for me. Doesn't mean if you ask me a question, you can't ask him the same question, but obviously he'll hear my answer, which may or may not bias him.

I would say this. On all the references that we got, there were a couple of things that came out very consistently: Extraordinarily hard-working, great humility, cares deeply about the players, has always put players in a position to win, whatever their position may be on the field, the defense, his background as you know is an offensive guard at UNC but he's had some work on the defensive side of the ball in addition to the offensive work he's had.

So the humility was another factor that we heard consistently. Strong, strong with the players when necessary but fair and balanced. But he definitely has great humility, which speaks well for him.

And the other thing, I'll give you an example and this I can share with you, I think Coach Gibbs would be find with it. I got a text yesterday from Coach Gibbs, Joe Gibbs, and Joe had Coach Smith on his staff, I'm trying to think of the years, it was 2006 -- 2007, 2008, 2009 when Coach Gibbs was in Washington and I've had a relationship with Joe. We didn't call him for any references but he texted me yesterday and said, "I just want you to know that this young man, who I had in the very early stages of his NFL career did a superlative job for me. I always thought he was going to go places in the league. He was always hard working, very thoughtful, bright, always was helpful to me."

And so you know, that wasn't solicited. I didn't call Joe or ask him or anything, etc., had a relationship with him, but it was nice to hear that from a Hall of Fame coach, as well.

With that, let me turn it over to your questions and we'll get through those as soon as you would like and we'll get on to the important part of today's press conference, which is you all having a chance to meet Coach Smith and our fans having a chance to meet Coach Smith, as well.



**Q. What's the new structure now with your new GM and coach now, and who has control of the roster and everything, because we had the co-team builders last time around?**

ARTHUR BLANK: I think it's similar in that regard. Terry and Arthur will both report correctly to Rich McKay. They both view that -- you can ask them specifically, but they both made a point of saying they view that as a real plus in our situation. They both view Rich as somebody who is an experienced NFL executive who has been a general manager, been around the league for 25 years or longer, probably 27 years or so, somebody who is connected to the League, to the competition committee and a variety of other things. They view that as a resource that they wouldn't ordinarily have. Whether it be a first-time head coach or a first-time general manager, I think that's important.

So that structure will exist. I think the beauty of their relationship, they can describe it to you themselves, let Arthur talk about it, but Terry and Arthur really didn't know each other. They had not worked together. One of our candidates was a young man, very qualified who had worked with Terry -- for Joe Grady. Terry reached out, developed a relationship with Arthur, felt very strongly that was the right choice for us. Had done his homework, and etc.

I think the beauty of both of them is that whether 53 or 48 or 48 or 53 or whatever numbers you want to throw around, I think they both would give you the same answer, and that is who has what is kind of secondary. Somebody will have the 53. Somebody will have the 48. But it's really not terribly important because they both see the world of football with the same eyes, with the same vacation, and I think that means if it comes down to the 53 or the 48, usually it means that you probably keep digging and try to find another answer, as opposed to saying, well, I have the 53 or I have the 48.

Rich, are you on the call now? McKay?

RICH MCKAY: I am, Arthur, and you explained it right. We tried to set it up in a way that it was collaborative. That was kind of what we talked about from the very beginning. I think that's Arthur's vision, I should say Coach Smith's vision and that is Terry's vision and that was what was talked about. I think it to Mr. Blank's point. I think when we interviewed Terry, we brought up coaches, and the first name he brought up was Arthur Smith. And when we interviewed Arthur, we brought up GM candidates, and the first name he brought up was Terry Fontenot, so that was a good thing for us.

ARTHUR BLANK: To answer your question, and again, you can ask the other Arthur that same question, but I think what you'll hear is that the structure itself, they will work together very closely and hopefully they will see the world the same way.

**Q. In these two tough searches, what stood out about both of the candidates that listed them above the seven and the five people that you all interviewed?**

ARTHUR BLANK: Well, I think it's a variety of things. First of all, I would say this. I think both decisions were challenging for us, which doesn't take away for one minute of the two we did select, Terry and Arthur.

But I would say that it speaks well where the NFL is and where the candidate pool is coming and growing. We had a lot of very qualified people this year. I think my view, in terms of Coach Smith, you care about humility, hard work, leader, players love him, very creative, produced at a high level at Tennessee and as adopted an offense in Tennessee around their players, around who they have, in this case an outstanding running back and a quarterback who frankly didn't have a great career before he came to Tennessee. And I think I give Coach Smith a lot of credit for that, along with Ryan Tannehill and same thing with Derrick Henry -- until he was coordinated by Arthur Smith.

I felt all those factors were really important to us. The fact that he was creative, staying ahead of the terms of what's happening in the NFL -- you know, some leaders have the ability to see around corners, and I think it's important, not everybody can do that. I think Coach Smith has done that, has shown the evidence of that. His offense has been a leading one. He's prepared to make adjustments to it based on the players that he has.

We have talked about our roster and he'll respond to the questions he has about that and how he'll use the roster that we have and the skill positions that we have, with adjusting an emphasis, more emphasis in the future on the running game than we currently have had.

With Terry, spent that many years, I think 16 years or 17 years with the Saints organization. Obviously they produced at a very high level over that period of time. He's been in the middle of that on the pro side and recently on the college side and later this afternoon Terry will respond to those questions. He's worked with Sean Payton. I actually had a phone call last night from their general manager wanting to congratulate us on the selection of Terry and that he felt -- he felt badly, one, because he's a very capable guy, staying in our division, but that is what it is.

But beyond that, he was really very excited for him. He had worked very closely with Sean Payton who is, you know, an outstanding coach; I would also say a very demanding coach. I don't think Sean Payton would say anything less than that and demands excellence from the whole organization. That kind of training is important. I think Coach Smith and Coach Payton are different people but you want somebody who has worked -- has had his hand on the anvil and has worked in an intense situation and I think Terry has done that.

His ability on the provide and influence on the college side has been outstanding. They have done a great job at building their roster over the years during free agency and in a variety of ways to recruit players and players that later turned out to be performing at a Pro Bowl level. So we like his ability to have a vision over the whole department and his experience over that period of time.

I feel very good and our fans should feel very good about the choices that we made, really, in their behalf.

**Q. Speaking of the diversity of hires of head coaches, how important was it for you in your search for a coach to consider mean or the candidates and do you have any concern there's not been any more diversity in the five that have been hired by the NFL so far?**

ARTHUR BLANK: It's a really good question. Particularly coming on the heels of Monday, MLK Day and what-have-you, those thoughts are with us throughout the year and certainly coming out of Monday, as well.

In my opinion, I think the diversity of the pool of candidates, both the general managers and head coaches this year was excellent, and I also think for coordinators. I think Coach Smith can speak to that in some detail; Rich can, as well. I think what you'll see, there were a number of coordinators that are diverse candidates that will not get opportunities this year but will get opportunities in the future. A very wide range of candidates we've seen in that regard.

The fact that you have two general manager here in Atlanta and in Detroit, the young man we interviewed there, Brad Holmes, as well both diverse candidates, that's really important because we haven't had that diversity at the general manager position. If you look at the history of the NFL, often -- more often than we would like but coaching changes are made and GM changes are not made as frequently. I think that these young men and other men in the future will have an opportunity to be part of the hiring cycle for other coaches, which I think will help the issue of looking at diverse candidates in a fair and balanced way.

And I think every team has to speak for itself. I think we interviewed a wide variety of very capable candidates and we just felt for us at this point in time Coach Smith was the best coach for us and we felt that Terry Fontenot was the best general manager for us. It wasn't really based on diversity, per se, but it was based on who was most qualified, but we did have a great slate of diverse candidates.

With these GM choices and one head coach selected by the Jets to be their head coaches is a diverse candidate, and still two other teams in the discussion stages and we'll see where they end up. But I am encouraged by the pipeline of the coordinators and not only the coordinators but the number of quarterback coaches and such that I think will create a bigger pool in the future.

**Q. A little bit off the beaten track here, but do you know Arthur's father very well, and I suppose if so, you got a good recommendation from him.**

ARTHUR BLANK: Well, actually, I don't know his dad at all. I've never met his father. I did find out in the second interview process that Coach Smith had read my book just published, Good Company. I don't know if his dad had read it or not but knew about me and said some kind things about me. So I'm looking forward to it.

It's interesting, my son, Joshua, works at the NFL office in New York and he happened to run into Roger Goodell after we made our selection, and the commissioner said to Josh, he said, "I want you to know that the young man that you're hiring is terrific. He's outstanding. Comes from a great family, etc., etc. I know his father well and his father and I have a really good relationship," which is nice to hear.

I will say this, this is just my view and you're welcome to speak to Coach Smith about it but obviously he's very proud of what his father did, founder of a great international company, and has a great track record, great set of values, etc.

But the fact that he has access to his father, not just as a father but as a counselor and getting advice and counsel from him over the years an organizational standpoint, dad, how do we do this how, do we do this, we need somebody that's disconnected, how do we bring back in the fold.

There's a variety of things with my children that I've been able to share with them over the years that I hope God willing will be helpful to them in their careers. So I'm sure that Fred has done that with Arthur. That's the feeling I have; he's done that with him so I think that's an advantage, not the reason we hired him but it is an advantage I think for him personally. And I think he's taken

advantage of that and speaks well for him, his dad and his relationship but I'm looking forward to meeting his father.

I do know when I chatted with Arthur, he said, well, you know, my family is going to be close and just make sure we have several suites available at the stadium for them. I'm not sure who in the family it's for; he'll describe that, but he's got a great relationship with his family and that's important.

It's important to all of us because our culture and our relationships with each other, it's not just about winning but how we win and it is about winning, I get it, I understand that but it's how we win as well. I think that Coach Smith is going to help make sure that happens the right way.

**HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH:** How y'all doing? I just want to thank Arthur Blank, Rich McKay and the whole Falcons organization for providing me this opportunity to be the head coach of the Atlanta Falcons. It's an unbelievable opportunity and a dream come true.

Also want to thank my wife, Allison, my kids, Tanner, Sophie and Liam for the sacrifices they have made, allowed me to do this job and get to this point. And thank my entire family. I've got a large family. I grew up one of ten. I have got a million cousins, nieces and nephews, and the support they have given me.

I do find it a little bit of fate that kind led me to Atlanta as we have gone on this journey. There's an Atlanta native and great character in college football, Pepper Rodgers. Some of you may be more familiar than others with him, and he was a great player at Georgia Tech and he was the head coach at Georgia Tech at one point.

Pepper, when I grew up was around Memphis, a good friend of my father's and I had a good opportunity to start playing football at nine years old, fell in love with the game, gave me an identity and if pepper was around, we attended a lot of Orange Bowls, an incredible job thing I was able to growing up and my love of the game was built there. And Pepper told me the history of the game and the stories and he had a huge impact that got my interest peaked as a player that ultimately led to me coaching.

I just wanted to bring that up because I think about Pepper today.

When I started playing football nine years old in county leagues at Memphis, I had so many coaches that had a huge impact that kind of inspired me and I don't want to start naming names because I don't want to leave out anybody. And same thing when I was at high school at Georgetown Prep and University of North Carolina, and

obviously when I started my coaching career at North Carolina and Washington and Ole Miss and Tennessee, I can't thank all the coaches, teammates I've had over the years and players and everybody that had an impact on me that allowed me to get to this spot where I am today.

I'm so excited to have the opportunity to be the coach here. I'm so excited to work with Terry Fontenot to have a collaborative effort to build the franchise and this football team going forward for 2021 and beyond.

With that, I'd like to open up to questions.

**Q. Defensively, what do y'all want to do scheme-wise and how are you in your search for filling out your staff and so forth?**

**HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH:** Yeah, we're still in the process. We'll take our time. We've interviewed multiple people for coordinator spots and staff, and like I said, we will take our time. We want to be adaptable. That will be a big thing here. We will play to the strengths of our team but we want to be flexible and adaptable, and that's one thing we are looking for schematically as we go through this process of hiring coaches.

**Q. With that, have you been able to or will you undertake a roster evaluation?**

**HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH:** We're still early in that process. Biggest thing for me last season was being the coordinator of Tennessee Titans and I went all-in and the interview process here in a couple days, it will be an ongoing evaluation. Weren't be a snap judgment. It will be thorough. So we are still early in that process.

**Q. Going back to what Arthur Blank was talking about, in terms you having known Terry Fontenot, can you speak to the relationship that y'all have developed relatively quickly and how you feel you can work with him?**

**HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH:** Sure. You know, Terry's got a great reputation. I didn't know Terry personally until this interview process started and Terry and I started talking, and we share the same values and that's big and I believe it's the values we all share with the Atlanta Falcons and that's huge. I can't wait to work with Terry day one, like any relationship it will grow but it will be a collaborative effort. I can't say enough good things about Terry and the reputation he has.

**Q. How do you see the careers of Matt Ryan and Julio Jones playing into your offense and your evaluation of what you've seen the Atlanta Falcons do the last year?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Sure, but it's more than Matt, Julio. There's a lot of talented players on this roster, whether you talk about Chris Lindstrom, Grady Jarrett. We are so early in this process. The roster today is going to look different from today to September and as you get to Week 17. It's a constant evolution. There's a lot of talent we want to build off but I can't give you any snap judgment today because we are still early in this process.

**Q. Curious of your views of the team from afar, and what's needed to get this team back in the playoffs?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, views from afar, we didn't play the Falcons this year. We played them two years ago. My concern was 2021 and beyond. I was concerned with the Titans and Titans offense last year and going forward, all that matters is us going forward and how we build this thing out. Because as you know, things change week-to-week, year-to-year and only thing we are looking at is going forward.

**Q. With the Combine this year going virtual, who do you rely on knowing you can't see your first-ever the Draft class in person for workouts?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: First thing is we are going to ask our players to be flexible and adapt, and certainly I've got to be adaptable. Check everybody is going to play by the same set of rules, and we have to be smart and creative and adapt to these are what the circumstances are. We are going through a 100-year pandemic, and here we are. So if we have to go through Zoom for workouts, that's what we'll do. And we'll rely on everybody. There's great personnel people here. Terry as he fills out a staff, we'll have a collaborative effort there. We'll find a way, I promise you that, but everybody will be involved in it.

**Q. In general when it comes to your offensive line, what is your philosophy of that unit to get things going up front?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: We have a certain standard we want to play. We're going to play physical and with great effort. I know a lot of people say that but that will be our hallmark. We'll adapt to the personnel we have. Always dealing with different injuries and circumstances that pop up. We'll be adaptable and adapt to whoever's there.

**Q. At Georgia how did you come up with your system of Marvel super heros to do the plays within the plays on the offensive line with your good, John Tabeco (ph)?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Talking about my family, my older brother, he still is a Marvel fanatic. He always says -- I wasn't a big comic book reader but he was and it was just easy to use that. I still use stuff like that to try to be creative in our teaching that we used with the players last year. You can ask some of those guys and analogies, but that's funny. That's good research you did there.

**Q. In your first experience as a head coach, do you have any apprehension about entering a new realm as your first-time experience as a head coach and can you talk about those you've coached under and learned from and give an example of something you may have learned, for instance from Coach Gibbs.**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, there's a lot of things. Obviously any job you take, we all take those risks and excited and there's always the unknown. I don't want to be the same coach today that I am in 2022 and 2023 and we are constantly trying to improve and grow in this job.

So going back to your question with the head coaches, I've learned from every coach I've played under, that's why I always try to listen more than talk. Coach Gibbs has had a big impact and over the years since I stopped working for him. A lot of great lessons learned. A lot of those are more private than others. Schematically he had an impact on maybe some of the ways I maybe wanted to attack the playoffs and that was beneficial to me but.

He's had an enormous impact, and all these guys have. And I start naming names, it's like leaving out some of your brothers and sisters, and I'm conscientious of that because I do have such a large family.

**Q. When you're looking at the two years you were the offensive coordinator of the Titans, you have the league's leading rusher in Derrick Henry but you were also really good in the red zone. What are some of the keys you've learned to being successful in those areas?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, sure, certainly is doing the more practical thing, playing to the strengths of your players. We had Derrick Henry in Tennessee. There's only one Derrick Henry. Certainly think we're going to go find the next Derrick Henry. We'll adapt to the players we have here in Atlanta and the ones add to the roster.

Ryan was very decisive in the red zone and a lot of lot of guys that can make plays. We'll just try to use the full force of our offense. We didn't want to be an isolation football



team. The credit goes to those guys. We had a lot of guys make a lot of plays for us.

**Q. As you look to fill out your staff, how important will the offensive coordinator role be, given that you called the players be and presumably will be doing so?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, it's huge. Any coach we bring in here, first off, they are going to have to be great coaches and great people and the same set of values. We don't want group think. That's why we are taking our time as we go through it and we've gone through a huge list already and we'll continue to do that, with diversity of candidates and guys with diversity of thought, as well.

But yeah, those hires are very important so we're just trying to make sure we make the right ones.

**Q. If you could peel back the curtain a little bit and let us know how much of your interview or your pitch was about working with players that are already here and how much was focused on the future? What was that conversation like?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: It was about both. It was about having a short-term plan and a long-term plan and that's what it is. You make grand statements right now, so many things can happen before we ever kick off week one. But you have to have a short-term plan and a long-term plan and that always factors into it.

**Q. Matt Ryan, you had the fourth pick, a lot of people see that quarterback; how much have you thought about that and where do you see Matt Ryan working in next year with the Falcons?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: We have a long way to the draft just like anybody on our roster, I'll be evaluated; I have to earn my job every day.

We are excited about the players we have and we want to obviously go through the whole thing but to give you -- I can't make a statement today because there's a long process ahead of us as we evaluate this roster, Terry and I and everybody that's going to be involved in the decision-making. Matt Ryan has been a terrific quarterback and I have all the respect in the world for Matt Ryan and I work forward to working with him.

**Q. You alluded to this in bits and pieces but what kind of identity do you really want to build with this team here in Atlanta?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, certainly, we want

to be great up front. We want to have a fast team and we certainly want to be physical on both sides of the ball. We want guys that will be great teammates and we're going to hold our best players accountable. That's what it is, drop the entitlement, not to say it was here, but that will be a big message in the locker room and we want to be adaptable because things change. Where you're drafting from changes year-to-year, and you're adding pieces and you want to be flexible, and we want guys that are going to be adaptable especially week-to-week, we have to play the game to win.

**Q. You were obviously their No. 1 choice but you interviewed with a bunch of teams. What was it about the Falcons that attracted you?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Several factors. It was the way it was structured from Arthur Blank down to Rich McKay and the way this organization -- it's one of the premiere organizations in sports and it's first class in every aspect. It was helpful to go around and see how other people did it but I had a strong conviction, I was thankful they offered me the job and happy to be here.

**Q. Going to hate not to have you here at Nashville but that being said, what are some of the things that you learned so much from Mike Vrabel to help prepare you for this opportunity?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: I can't thank Mike Vrabel for giving me the shot, the opportunity to be the play caller. He holds every player on that roster accountable and there's a lot of great leadership lessons I learned from Mike. He was very flexible with things we did. I'll miss that relationship a lot. He had a huge impact on my career.

But yeah, I'm not Mike Vrabel. You know, same thing we'll talk later. You have to be yourself. I'll be myself. There are a lot of lessons learned from very good coaches I've been around.

There's only one Mike Vrabel, and I don't think I can have the same temperament he does and the ability he has at practice to get one group and go right into the next.

**Q. You've seen multiple coaches install their culture and establish that, so for you what will be the key to doing that successfully and immediately, because you know NFL, not for long, that's how it works. I'm sure you want to hit the ground running?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Sure, that will be the message early on, what the expectations are and how we're going to hold guys accountable.



But you don't come in here day one, it doesn't happen overnight. Anything good is a foundation and you have to build day-by-day. That meeting, the first meeting we had, fitting with what the league rules are in the spring, that's a slow build, building up to the season.

**Q. With Tennessee, one of the foundations of your offense was wide zone with the play-actions and bootlegs, I assume you'll stick with that philosophy. Can you explain what you believe are the strengths of that approach?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, we also ran a decent amount of gap schemes, too. We were flexible. We certainly had a wide zone foundation and we adapted. I think that's a lot of times that there's a lot of mythology to it that people, because they come from one system but if you look around, there's a natural evolution, whether you look at what's going on in San Francisco to the L.A. Rams to Green Bay Packers and there's more teams that run it.

I'm just going on connections there. We certainly adapted at Tennessee. We were good with our foundation. When we were a little bit bigger in other spots, I think the evidence will show we did adapt to those, wide-outs or certainly Derrick Henry and we'll continue to do the same thing here in Atlanta.

**Q. You said earlier that you don't want group think; you want diversity of thought. Can you expand on that? You've worked for a lot of head coaches, without necessarily saying you took from each one, what have you learned in terms of what it takes to be a successful head coach and have a successful staff?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, sure, I think that worst thing you can do is go hire a bunch of yes-men on a staff. You want guys with experience and young guys and creative guys. You want to share the same values but you have to challenge each other. I think the best thing that happens sometimes is there is fair criticism and you have to constantly evaluate it and that's a challenge as a head coach, make sure you get the right information to you, that people are telling you what's really going on. That happens a lot of times in different leadership structures. So that's one thing. We want to create an environment where we are able to sustain success with the multiple coaches here.

And then going back to about how to lead, I've taken leadership lessons from a lot of different businesses and love reading about history and certainly working with different head coaches, we mentioned Joe Gibbs and Joe Gibbs won three Super Bowls and did it with three different quarterbacks. There's certain things I didn't realize at the

time but looking back, about how he went about, how he managed the team on a day-to-day basis and there's a lot of coaches that I've learned from but the consistent -- it's a long, hard road and it's day after day being consistent. That's the message I can give you, be consistent, what I learned from those guys.

**Q. Does it take awhile in the NFL to turn things around whether it's schematically, whether it philosophy, whether it's just attitude, and so as you look at the Falcons, a team that's missed the playoffs the last few years, what should your message be in terms of how long this can take to turn around?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: I'm not going to give predictions because every circumstance is so different. Every year is different. Certainly we all need good players. That's the beauty of the NFL. That's what I love about it because there is a lot of parity and there's a lot of strategy involved in building rosters and when you have to adapt to injuries.

But it's hard for me to compare. That's one thing you'll learn for me I'm not going to compare players. Works for some people. I don't. We're all different. Every team we're going to coach, I think the 2021 team will be different than the 2022 team. Different issues everywhere. So that's just kind of my philosophy on that.

**Q. I don't know if it's possible in a summary, but what most about your father's examples helped get you to where you are now?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: One thing I'll make clear, I've never mistaken his success for my success and I wholeheartedly believe that. He didn't push that on any of his kids.

And I was fortunate enough, obviously don't realize it growing up, nobody knows, you know, we're all born in different circumstances and that's what it is. I had great parents, both my mom and dad, that instilled great values in us, hard work and compassion and we're fortunate enough. I obviously didn't realize as a little kid who my dad was, and I certainly don't think I'm special; he doesn't think he's special.

But just like every resource we'll have here in Atlanta, I'll use them all and my dad as we have gotten older has provided me great lessons in management, leadership, strategy and he's been a great father, and a father I want to be to my kids, as well.

**Q. As you're coming up in this profession, does your background almost work against you in did you always**

**have to prove that you were really interested in football when you had so many other options? Life?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: I don't know. Maybe some ways it probably helped. Maybe it lowered expectations. I don't know. You'd have to ask those around me. I just tried to do work hard at the job they gave me.

**Q. As you were coming up, how often were you asked how important is football to you, and given your background was that an issue?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: I don't think anything's an issue. I don't get offended by anything. Maybe gave me a little bit of a chip on my shoulder. That's what I love about the game of football. There are results. That's what attracted me to the game. Gives you an identity. There's no sport like it. You talk about diversity and people, different backgrounds, look at professional football. It's different than any other pro sport. It let me see the world in a different light, and you had to go out there and prove it. It didn't matter if your dad was a CEO or from Pomona, California; you get on that football field, you have to prove it. That's what always attracted me. It's a results-driven business and I want to be judged by that.

**Q. I want to know what your pitch was to Arthur Blank. Why did you think you're the man for the job?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: I was very confident in what we had done but I thought it was a great fit. First off, unbelievable to get this opportunity to sit in front of him and Rich McKay and present why I could be a head coach, using my history of what I've done as a coach and different backgrounds and different aspects of the entire team not just the offense, my philosophical beliefs in how to build a team and how to coach a team. That's all I presented to him.

It's like taking the SAT, it's great for a number but just look at the body of work and that's what I wanted to present, here is my body of work, what I've done with history throughout the game. That's what I presented to them.

**Q. Outside of football, how much time have you spent in Atlanta?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: I love Atlanta. It's like a dream come true. You talk about a fit. I grew up in Memphis, went to high school and went to D.C. and went to Chapel Hill, spent a year in Oxford, Mississippi and then Nashville. All up and down the east and definitely the southeast, and being from Memphis, there's a similar field to it in terms of hospitality and Atlanta is obviously different,

it's a bigger city and it has a great history. My family and I are excited to be part of this community.

**Q. You mentioned Pepper Rodgers. Why has the history of the game been so important and shaped you as a head coach?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: History in general, I love history. There's a lot of lessons. Somebody said life is same stories repeated so you study history. My love of the game brought it to me and Pepper, if anybody talked to him or knew him, he was a great storyteller. I've always been fascinated by great storytellers. He was a character. I love listening to him. Maybe there's a nostalgia to it just thinking back on it.

**Q. Have you hired anybody for your staff and any current or last year's coaches you'll be talking with to possibly join?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: We'll talk. There's a certain number of guys we'll talk to. We haven't made any hires yet. We're getting close probably on a few. Again we're going to be very thorough about this. Just like I told earlier about Terry and I, there's going to be no snap judgments made. We're going to be thorough. We want to get it right.

**Q. Unless I missed it, if you were clear, sorry if I missed it, are you calling plays or are you not calling plays or is that yet to be determined?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: No, I'm going to call the plays.

**Q. Sometimes when head coaches call plays, they lose sight of the big picture, not saying that's the case here, but do you expect that to be an adjustment?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: My No. 1 job is head coach of the team, so that's all three phases and every player on the roster. It my job to make sure I coach an entire team. I understand, for example, we talk about history and some there that have done really well and some that haven't.

Again, I understand what my job is and my job is to coach the entire team and also do that to call plays. And there's precedent there that it's been done and done at a high level. I'm very confident if you hire the right people, it will be a collaborative effort and my job, like I said, I will coach the entire team.

**Q. What do you subscribe to as far as do you take a look at what you have as a personnel offensively and**





**say, hey, I'm going to just try to make an adjustment and try to work with what I have or is it a matter of you saying, here is my system and here is what I'm going to run and I'm going to make sure you have what you need in order to be able to run what you want to run?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: There's a lot of factors in there and we have a foundation, but we are not going to be rigid. We are going to play the strength of our roster. And there's a constant evolution. The whole thing is you're constantly trying to improve your football team and I'm constantly trying to improve myself as a coach.

So we will have a foundation up front and there are core beliefs we have in terms of running the football. But we are not going to be rigid. We'll be flexible and adapt and play to the strengths of our roster. Our roster right now certainly will look different in the coming months and that will always change during the season. You have to adapt, 100 percent in this league, there are going to be injuries and we have to adapt to that and that's what the really good teams do.

**Q. What do you attribute to the type of success you have calling plays in the red zone?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Like I said we tried to spread the ball around. We didn't want to play isolation football, to use a basketball term. We wanted the guys moving around and hit it from a lot of different angles. We had good personnel there and we had a lot of unselfish players, same message we'll preach to these guys.

**Q. Mr. Blank mentioned appreciating your humility. This is a sport with a lot of bravado and we see that from people in your position. How does humility fit in with you as a coach?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, it's a huge factor. You understand that it's a competitive business. There's a lot of smart coaches and a lot of good players. Certainly would never think I've got all the answers. I think once you do that, you're set up for an epic fail. I understand and we have confidence but just understand as soon as you think you got all the answers, you're going to get humbled and this league will humble you quick.

**Q. You talked about adaptability and making the scheme fit the players you have. If after looking at the roster, evaluating what you have, if you deem that you need one, how important will it be to go get a workhorse-type running back, somebody that could carry the load if they need to get 25, 30 touches game?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, there's a lot of

ways to do that. So to answer your first question, you have got two guys, great. Cleveland has found success doing that this year.

We adapted to Derrick. Like I said, there's only one Derrick Henry, and he's like having Shaquille O'Neal in his prime; you have to feed the big fella, and certainly we did that in Tennessee. Like I said, every year in different.

That's an example of playing to our strengths and there's multiple ways to do it; if you have two guys or three guys or if you do find one. I think we have to be flexible. That's something Terry and I will map out and then we'll see what happens this spring and what pieces we had and we have currently on the roster.

**Q. I talked to Harry Douglas, somebody that's played for both franchises, Falcons and Titans and one thing that stood out to him is that you demand toughness on both sides of the ball and you use players in perfect spot especially on offense. What's one thing you would want your players to know when you think about how your former players think about you?**

HEAD COACH ARTHUR SMITH: Well, certainly nice of Harry and Harry is certainly one of the toughest players I've been around. I just know we'll be consistent and fair and we'll hold all these guys accountable and best thing we can do is hold our best players accountable to that standard.

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