

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Terry Fontenot

Arthur Blank

Weekday Press Conference



ARTHUR BLANK: I'm not going to repeat everything I said earlier because you don't want to hear the same thing again. I'm pleased to have Terry Fontenot join us after a storied 16-year career in New Orleans and has had great experiences with the Saints, not only working with one of the leading GMs in the league, Mickey Loomis, but also with a great coach, Sean Payton. Both Mickey and Sean, by reputation and actuality, they both demand very high bar, very high standards when it's excellence, it's got to be that and even better.

So Terry has been groomed in that environment and has produced in that environment. Obviously the saint Saints how well they have done for a long period of time, and maybe is a chance now with Drew maybe retiring, we have a chance to go back and compete again.

But we are very fortunate. Terry was one of the leading candidates that we spoke with and we are just thrilled to have him as part of our team. I did get a phone call from the general manager, Mickey Loomis, I don't think Mickey would mind me saying this. He said, really, truth of the matter is, he's not old enough to retire but he said, "When I was going to retire, that Terry was going to be my replacement. We really think he's one of the bright, young minds in the NFL today." Tremendous training, tremendous leadership and so I feel really good about getting that phone call and I didn't ask for it. I didn't reach out. He just made it which was very kind of him to do that.

Without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to Terry. I'll take your questions for me if you have any, myself or Rich, he's on the call obviously today, and then we'll turn it over to Terry. You guys ask as many questions as you like.

Q. Just wanted to know whether it was before this particular search or not, when did you first know who Terry Fontenot was and when did he kind of first pop up on your radar as someone that could become a GM in the NFL?

ARTHUR BLANK: I actually did not know who he was and maybe Rich did, I'm not sure, but I actually did not know. I knew who Mickey was and I had a had a relationship with Mickey. Thomas Dimitroff, our general manager, had a good relationship with Mickey Loomis and worked with him. Thomas probably knew of Terry. Terry might know that or not.

So I actually did not know. All the research we did kept pointing to him and a few other people, as well, that had some really good credentials that were ready to step to the next level, but once we had a chance to visit with him, we did several more times, and it was more complicated with Terry because their team was playing in the playoffs and Coach Smith was not, so it was easier for us to spend time with Coach Smith when he came to Atlanta.

Terry didn't have those opportunities. Coming to Atlanta this week with his family and be here first part of this coming week, so I'm anxious to -- I just had a chance to meet his children on a Zoom call, so he has three beautiful kids and I'm sure he has got a beautiful wife, as well.

But he is extraordinarily well rounded, not just on the pro side; I didn't ask him the question but spent quite a bit of time on the college side, as well.

So his experience level is very high and all the references we got on him, probably want to go back and redo his contract and now I'll say this, but we couldn't find anything about him that was not a positive. I think Rich would attest to that, as well.

Q. At what point did you realize that his philosophy and Arthur Smith's philosophy were in line with one another?

ARTHUR BLANK: That's a really good question because at the outset we didn't know that. We interviewed, you know, Terry first as I remember and we interviewed Coach Smith and it would seem like there was a connection and then the next time around, had a chance to touch base with Terry and you ought to ask this him to his credit.

One of the candidates we did think was a hot candidate was Joe Grady and Terry had a relationship with him for a couple years, he worked for the Saints, Joe. But he



already had reached out to a number of the other coaching candidates, not just Coach Smith but a number of the candidates and was already developing relationships.

One of the earlier phone calls we had with Terry after the first one, he already had been talking football vision with Coach Smith and what he wanted to do, how they would work together, together with coach and general manager, relationship, expectations of each and so it was very clear after that, and we obviously spoke at length with Terry, because you never want -- coach's career, have them not work together and philosophically be in agreement on the collaboration that we know is necessary.

The best teams in the NFL have great collaboration probably in every institution or organization, for that matter, outside of the NFL, at the very top. That doesn't mean styles can't be different and other things can be different, but philosophically, culture and core values are really the same, and I think these three gentlemen really shared all that together and they did it behind the scenes before we even were discussing it with them.

Q. Actually I have a question spinning off just before the Zoom started, you were talking about how exhausting this is. You've been through this a few times with coaches and general managers. Have you learned anything about the process, how difficult it is and what expectations if any you have coming out of it.

ARTHUR BLANK: You asked earlier Coach Smith, I don't think it was you, but it may have been you, what he learned from other coaches along the way. Well, I've had some elders along the way that have kind of put their arm around my shoulder and said, you know, as you're looking for coaches or general manager, this is the counsel I'll give you.

I remember I got one phone call from -- inaudible -- great owner and great family and helpful to me in quiet ways, given me guidance and John Mara, who has gone, as well, or his father, I should say, Wellington Mara. And one of the things they both said to me independently at different times is that if you're going through a search for a coach or a general manager, you need to have a sense of urgency because you want to interview as many people as you can but not be rushed.

So I think it was very important in both cases to take our time, do the interviews, don't jump to judgment, make sure we listen and hear from everybody, and actually the process is very good because you hear from a number of GM candidates in this case and coaches, about although it's kind of surface/superficial, but you hear about their

evaluation of your team.

And I said this to Rich, and I maybe even said it to Terry, I don't know, but one of the things that was very interesting to me is that all of these coaches, GM candidates, they all pretty much saw our team the same way. They pretty much saw our talent the same way. A lot of that was consistent with internally what we would say, as well. But some of it was not. That was interesting. Because you know, it's like we all have children, not all of us, but a lot of us have children and you tend to fall in love with your own children and sometimes you have some blind spots with your kids. I think that part of it for me is always very interesting. I don't want to do it every year for obvious reasons.

But it is interesting I think when you listen to a number of other people that are pretty bright, played against us. Terry would be a good example; he's played against us twice a year for 16 years. So he knows our team and knows it well.

And then the other part of it which I've learned and gotten some good counsel from coaches on this including people like Pete Carroll, you want to put staff together as quickly as you can but you don't want to rush to do that either. You want to interview as many people as you can.

Like Terry will talk about how he'll interview a number of our people and personnel and we think we have a lot of great people. He may want to make a few changes here and there, I don't know, that's up to him to do that.

But take your time. Understand who is there. Understand who else you may want to bring in from the outside, etc., but don't rush to do it because there are opportunities, and as you know, we have our championship games this coming Sunday and then we have the Super Bowl. There are going to be some coordinators or position coaches available that are still playing now. So you can't always go and grab, if you will, who is available and who is on the street now. You need to be patient with that.

Other questions for me?

THE MODERATOR: Open up to Terry Fontenot at this time.

TERRY FONTENOT: First of all I want to thank you all for being here. I know the press conferences were spread out, but I really appreciate you guys making time for this and being here. I want to thank Arthur Blank, Rich McKay, Russ and Webster, everybody involved in the process because it wasn't easy necessarily going through the process when you're focused on your team, you're in the



playoffs and that was a challenge but I think you learned a lot about an organization in that process.

The entire time, they were very respectful of the Saints and my time and they were willing to wait for me and that means a lot to me because every team wouldn't do that but I could tell they had a lot of conviction on me, they were very confident in my abilities and really wanted me as their general manager, and that means a lot to me. So the process couldn't have been more transparent and smooth so I really appreciate that.

Before I get to anything, I want to acknowledge my family. They are all here right now wearing their Falcons gear they got in this morning. They are really excited about it. I have a beautiful wife, four beautiful children, three girls and one boy, Landry, London and Lenox, we call her baby Lenny, and my lone wolf, Katy.

They are really excited to come to Atlanta. They are really smart, intelligent kids. They are athletic. So there's going to be a school and a park that's going to be really excited to have them as part of the community.

Look, it's hard on families, anybody that works in this business, they know how difficult it is on families and just the challenges of our jobs and how much we are away and all the sacrifices they make, it's not easy on them. My wife is the star and she makes it work and I'm blessed to have a family like this and they allow me to work as hard as I need to work, and they are so into it and so supportive. I'm blessed to have a family like this.

Not just my immediate family, but my entire family is very supportive. If I go back to my parents, I'm one of seven, my siblings, I don't have as many siblings as Arthur Smith does. But I'm one of seven, right in the middle, and my core values, my work ethic, my passion, my strong faith, my optimistic disposition, that comes from my family and that comes from the way I was raised and that's really important to me.

Same with my wife. She has amazing parents and amazing family, and they have made her who she is. And both of our families, we are both from Lake Charles and we met in high school. We have a lot of family in Lake Charles that is displaced with the horrible storm, and that's difficult and our prayers go out to them and we are going to help as much as we can with that process. But they have really made us who we are.

I want to talk about my New Orleans family, starting with Mickey Loomis. 18 years ago, Mickey Loomis pulled in a 22-year-old kid (tearing up) -- I'm sorry, guys.

ARTHUR BLANK: It's all good. Take your time, Terry.

TERRY FONTENOT: And he really gave me the opportunity of a lifetime and not just any professional growth but my personal growth. He's done so much for my family and not just Mickey, the entire Saints organization, starting with the late Mr. Benson. Mrs. B, Dennis Lauscha, Sean Payton, they have done so much for my family for nearly two decades, top to bottom in that building, the people.

So many great coaches and so many great front office people, they have done so much for me and my family and I feel horrible because I've got like over 500 texts and I haven't responded to many of them, but I love you guys. I promise I'm going to go through each one of them and figure out a way to respond to everybody's texts, because you've meant so much to me and my family from the locker room all the way up to the front office throughout the entire building. I love you guys.

And then I want to talk about the Falcons organization, because leaving an organization like the Saints, I've had a great job and I'm in a great situation in New Orleans, so I wouldn't just leave for any opportunity. But when the Falcons wanted to interview me, right away, that's intriguing to me, not just because of this great city or this great organization.

But somebody told me to read Arthur Blank's book, I haven't read it, but when you read that book, it says something about who he is as a person, something that I already knew from the outside looking in, but just his core values and his principles. He wants to win and he has a high standard, but he wants to do it the right way and he wants to have sustained success, and he wants to do it with the right people and that speaks to me.

The way he wants to run his organization, every organization that he has, he operates with principles. He's a family man. I got to meet Max and Josh on the interview and I'm building relationships with them and it's a special family and from Arthur Blank, from Rich McKay, it's something I really want to be a part of. I'm really excited to move forward with this group and be a part of this city, be a part of this region and work hard to bring sustained success.

I couldn't be more excited about Arthur Smith. He's special. I think you can tell right away when you meet them and connect with them that you have not had a previous relationship with; it's no different if you're a scout evaluating a player, you look at everything. You dig into the resources. You're going to look into the stats and you're going to really cast a wide net and gather as much

information as you can, and it was all consistent with Arthur.

I think the most important thing, the most critical factor with the right head coach is to have the right leader of man. You want a good man, a good person, that is a good communicator that does the right things. He has principles. He operates the right way. He can connect to players throughout the entire roster. He can connect with everyone in the building. He's going to be a good communicator. He's highly intelligent and he's adaptive. Because it's one thing to have a specific scheme that you like but he's adaptive and he's going to maximize the players he has. And he's going to have a vision of what he wants but he's going to maximize the players he has. So everything, all of our communication has been really good and I got really excited about Arthur.

Look, my job as a general manager is to be a resource for him. It's my job to make him the best head coach he can be. It my job -- we're going to have a vision for this team and it's going to be a partnership and we're going to work together but it's my job to make sure he can focus on football, focus on the team and I make sure everything else is right. We're going to get the right people in the building. We're going to focus on the process and we're going to have a clear vision for what we're looking for, so I could not be more excited about Arthur Smith.

We both understand where we are as a team. We understand the salary cap and we understand that, hey, we are going to make decisions to have sustained success. We are not going to be prisoners of the moment. We are not going to make decisions that are going to help us in 2021 but they are going to hurt us in '22 and '23. We are going to think big picture and do the right things because the goal here is to build the team the right way and have sustained success.

I know there's a lot of good players on this roster and I know there's some areas that we need to address and I respect you guys, and I understand you have a job to do. But I don't believe this is the time to talk about specific players on the roster. I don't think it's fair at the point that we are in the process and it's not fair to the players or the staff so again, I understand you're doing your job but I don't think it's the time to discuss that at this point.

I know Arthur is working hard on the coaching staff right now. We are always going to prioritize character. We are always going to focus on the culture. We are going to get the right people in the building on the bus. We are going to be a process-driven organization. I believe in serving the leadership. It's my job to be a servant to everyone in the organization and to make sure that everyone has

everything they need to be successful and we are going to be a culture of competition.

We want to bring in good players at every position and we want to continue to add top to bottom on this roster and continue to bring competition.

I believe that -- I don't believe in accomplishments, I believe in opportunities, and I believe this is a great opportunity for me. It's a great opportunity for Arthur Smith. I don't take it for granted at all. I'm just so excited to get started and I actually have one thing and I'll let you guys ask questions.

Vaughn McClure, I had a relationship with Vaughn McClure, and it's weird, it's not normal for a person like me to have a relationship with Vaughn McClure because I'm in the front office for a rival team and he's a writer. I say we had a relationship; we text. I probably saw him two or three times a year prior to a game or a league event.

But for some reason every time I saw him, I felt like we were best friends because he was such a nice person. He had such a good energy about him and he was so positive. After I would talk to him, I would walk away feeling really good about myself. He was such a good person and that always stuck out to me.

So last time I talked to him, he was at Senior Bowl, and I was on my way to -- we were on our way to practice, me and a couple guys. We stopped to get coffee at a coffee shop and he was in the coffee shop and he was working on a story and he yelled at me and said, "Hey, Fontenot, I'm working on a story and you're going to be in it." It was a story about basically upcoming candidates, minority coaching candidates and minority general manager candidates. He said, "I've been doing a lot of research and I've been hearing good things about you. I think you're going to get a job or you're going to get an opportunity in this next cycle."

That's the last time I talked to him. So imagine in October, when I saw his tragic horrible death, that hit me hard. And again, this is somebody that I just saw a couple times a year but I felt like we had a strong connection.

Then I read an article came out right around that time and it talked about him as a person and talked about how endearing he was to the people around him, how he was always trying to help people around him. It talked about, actually showed an e-mail in the article where he e-mailed his boss and said, "Hey, tell me what I can do to get better, tell me, I want to be the absolute best at my job so tell me what I can do to get better."

That spoke to me because I believe that's what you're looking for, in coaches, players, everybody in the organization. You want people that are going to be great teammates. You want people that are going to help the people around him and you want people that are going to be humble enough to listen and try their best to get better.

My favorite poem or my favorite Martin Luther King speech is the Street Sweeper speech. You have to listen to him say it but it's really about whatever you're doing, whatever God has called you to do, do it with passion, do it with intensity, focus on the details. How you do anything is how you do everything. Focus on the details and really take advantage of that job and that's really how I see it.

When you have a special organization that's what you have. You have a lot of people top to bottom regardless of what their responsibility is, they have passion and intensity in everything they do, and they are great teammates, and they want to help people around them and they are humble enough to listen, whether it's myself or whether it's an intern. They are humble enough to listen and work hard to get better. I just wanted to just really acknowledge him, give my condolences to you guys, to his family and even though I only saw him a few times a year, he had an impact on my life.

ARTHUR BLANK: Terry, that's very kind of you to do that. Thank you so much. He was not only a very competent writer but he was a caring person. Whenever he had to write something that was not going to be really positive, he always did it, but he didn't take any joy in it. Thank you for recognizing that. He was very close to a lot of the people that you'll be chatting with here in a minute, so on behalf of his family, I appreciate that, thank you.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yes, sir.

Q. When did you first start to hear or learn about Arthur Smith, was it during this process or over the last few years and what's going to make this working relationship successful between the two of you?

TERRY FONTENOT: First of all, Darryl, I've listened to a millions of Falcons press conferences, and you're always the first question, always. So the fact that you don't have a question for me that, hurts my feelings, I'm just letting you know. I like the bow tie but I expected a question from you first.

Q. Your problem is with David, not me.

TERRY FONTENOT: So look, and you asked about Arthur and when I was aware of him. So I would say as a scout or as a person in the front office, it's your job to always,

whether it's college coaches, whether it's NFL coaches, you should always be working on that. You should, just like you evaluate players, you need to be evaluating coaches as well and looking at who the successful coaches are and the difficult part about that is we have a lot of really good coaches in the Saints building. I think we have a lot of really good head coaching candidates, but you don't want to be just a prisoner of your immediate circumstance or area. You want to look out and continue to evaluate outside.

I would say over the last couple years what he was doing in Tennessee I was intrigued. I started doing my own research. Now, I didn't connect with him until this year, but I respected him from afar for really the last couple years. Then I communicated with people that have been with him, whether it was in Washington when he was a defensive assistant or right when he was starting out in Tennessee.

So you have so many people that you're close with that you can -- when you get information from somebody from ten years ago or from when they were in college and it's all a consistent message, I think that speaks a lot to him.

Q. In this collaborative effort between the two of you, who is going to have the 53 and who has the 48 and on top of all that, how prepared are you for this role being a GM for the first time?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, so me and Arthur discussed that and we talked a couple days ago, or yesterday, when my contract was getting done, and he had already gotten his contract done. We had a long discussion. We talked about different areas of the building. We talked about the roster. And it doesn't matter. And when I say that, it doesn't matter. It doesn't matter who has the 53 or the 46 or the 90 or who is in charge of this department because we are going to communicate about everything and we are going to be aligned.

We are going to have -- look, I'm not the just going to agree with him all the time and he's not going to just agree with me but it's our job to have those spirited discussions and to be honest with each other and to be open and inclusive in our communications. When I say this, I know it may sound cliché, but it doesn't matter but we're going to make Falcon decisions. When something happens and it goes really well and maybe we are on -- I wanted something he didn't, it doesn't matter because it's going to be a Falcon decision. All of our decisions are going to be that way.

Your other question was in regards to why we're going to work well together?

Q. And how prepared and how excited are you to have

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

this opportunity 18 years into your career.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, I'm really excited and I feel prepared. I would say the reason I feel prepared is coming from New Orleans, New Orleans is a culture of inclusiveness and openness and it's also a culture of development and I think that's really important. When I say that, it's not -- where I cut my teeth in the pro scouting department, you can have some people that cut their teeth in the college scouting department or in the or salary cap or general manager that come from different expertise and sometimes in different organizations they can be stuck in that mold or stuck in that role.

But in our organization, we are inclusive. Mickey Loomis and Khai Harley are in charge of the cap and manage the cap, yet I'm able to be involved in that process. Where Jeff Ireland is in charge of the college scouting department, I'm able to be involved in that process.

We are very close to our coaches and we are heavily involved in the entire process whether it's the entire week getting prepared for the game. It's an inclusive organization and it's an organization of development and that's the same thing we are going to have here. It's important to have people involved in all areas, and you have to have trust, you have to trust people but we are going to be a culture of development here as well.

Q. I want to go off this whole idea of culture of development. You really are somebody who has seen that in his life. You talked about coming into the Saints organization at 23 years old. When you look back at that time, what do you feel as though you did to climb the ladder and to stand out to kind of get you to where you are right now?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, and I wouldn't say there's any one thing or one dynamic. I think it's just consistency. Again the first thing Mickey told me is, hey, if you put your head down and you continue to work hard and you focus on the details and how you do anything is how you do everything, so you make sure you're consistent in what you do, then you're going to have opportunities to be successful.

So I would say it's more so consistency and humility, being willing to listen because there's so many good people around you, and again, coaches, scouts, you're going to be players, there's a lot of good people around you. You have to be willing to listen and willing to learn, willing to adapt.

So I've been blessed to be around some really good people and still I'm continuing to learn. I feel like anybody I meet I want to learn something from them. So I feel like I

had that mindset. And again, being in the type of culture I was in, I was able to be exposed of every area of the building.

Q. My second question is getting into the nitty-gritty of it a little bit. What were your initial thoughts when looking at roster construction, the salary cap and how are you planning to attack the next couple of months?

TERRY FONTENOT: It starts with self-scout and our assessment. As the staff gets in, I think it's really important to drill down to the details of the roster. I know the people that have been in this building, they have done that already but I need to do the same thing. I know the roster yet I really need to drill down to the details and do it along with Arthur Smith and once the coaches are in, we need to have extensive meetings with them and look at this roster and really determine how we feel about each player on the roster, where they are in their careers, what's their plan for development or what's their plan for maintaining them. So really understanding this roster and where we are.

From there, now we can assess where are our major areas of need, where do we have surplus. We can really assess our roster and then we can develop our plan for the off-season from that point. That's the most critical area and that's important because that's going to be our first time to really get on the same page with the coaches and understand what they are looking for with players. So it's going to be an important time for us to work along with them and set the stage for what we are going to do this off-season.

Q. Given like everything you just said, do you feel like you are maybe ahead of the curve from somebody else because you are coming from New Orleans and you've seen the Falcons two times or every year you've been in the NFL?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's a great point and look, I do feel like I have a better feel, like I did four interviews -- or excuse me, interviewed with four different teams. When I interviewed with the Falcons, I did feel like I knew the team a lot better because you've been able to see the team from my vantage point.

I can't wait to get from Flowery Branch because it's important to be in the building and to be able to communicate with everybody in the building and really understand the roster even better, because look, you assess the roster from your standpoint from where you are, but there's other factors, as opposed to just watching film. It's about who the players are and about their makeups and there's a lot of other factors.



Yes, I feel like I knew the Falcons better from being in the division yet getting in the building and building relationships with everyone in the building and getting to know the players is important.

Q. The Falcons are in the midst of a three-year playoff drought. The Saints were in the same spot. What were lessons the organization learned to get back on track and have success?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, good question. I would say No. 1 with the Saints because we've had a couple roster turn-arounds. We had, after Hurricane Katrina, this is '05. We had significant roster turnaround and we went from winning three games to ten games. That was significant. Then we had a stretch where we lost, we had three straight 7-9 seasons and we were able to really shift the roster.

I believe that No. 1, we are always focusing on makeup and makeup isn't just -- I know that can sound like a broad term but we're focused specifically on the character of the individual. We want a smart, tough, competitive football team. Yes, we want prototypes. We want big, we want fast, we want competitive players. We are going to focus on areas but we are going to focus on the makeup. It's easy to say that but we have to be detailed in our process in how we are assessing intelligence and detailed in our process and how we are assessing the football character, the personnel character and all the details and it's about working with the coaches and making sure we are going through the details of that process and making sure we are bringing the right people into the building.

I would say the culture in the locker room in New Orleans is excellent, and again, I believe the Falcons have a good culture. I believe our culture is excellent and I believe we'll focus on bringing in the right types of players and really the right types of people in the building. I would say that's made a big difference for us with the Saints.

Q. What made this job attractive to you?

TERRY FONTENOT: Darryl, did you just make up a question to say something? Because like six people went and you're finally asked a question. Did you make that up?

Q. It's on my list right here. It's been here all day. Question No. 1. I've got like 12 questions but they only give us two. So I just went to the top of the list. I've got 12 others for later on. That's my No. 1 question for you and I have a really good follow up, too.

TERRY FONTENOT: That's a really good question, I appreciate that question. Because when I'm in a place that I appreciate so much -- and I'm not the type of person that

is looking for a job. Matter of fact, I told this to every team I interviewed with. My goal isn't to be a general manager. That's not my goal. Like I'm not trying to be a general manager anywhere I can be a general manager.

My goal is to be part of an organization that I feel good about and I know we can win championships. It starts where I know for us in New Orleans, it starts with the leadership. It starts with Ms. Gale and Ms. Benson and her commitment to winning and her standard and New Orleans with the fans everything and the culture and the city, it's important and in New Orleans that they have that with Arthur Blank, as much as I respect him because it's important for me to not just build a team that can win, but winning the right way and so that right away, starting with ownership that, got me excited about this job and really throughout the entire process, I mean, the first interview might have been four hours.

The second was extensive, too. Every step of the way I felt really good about it and felt really good about the opportunity. It's attractive to two former GMs in the building that are really good people that you can learn from. I understand that I'm 40 years old and I'm 18 years in the business but I've never sat in that seat, and I understand there's different challenges when you sit in that seat. I've been blessed enough to be around Mickey that shared so much with me to be able to draw from his experiences but I don't know if Mickey is always going to take my calls anymore.

So I need people close to me that can really help me throughout the process. So starting with ownership and then going down to the group. And look, there were some, again, I understand we had some challenges but there are also some really good players on this roster. Top to bottom, I was really excited about the opportunity.

Q. Then today, here we're talking about putting Bill Nunn in the Football Hall of Fame, long overdue from the scouting side and you being the first African American here in the general manager's post. Has the historical part of it hit you there as we are in changing times?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, look, it's really a blessing. I'll say that. Again, I don't look at it like an accomplishment. I looked at it like an opportunity. I've gotten so many special text messages from so many people that I take it as a challenge because I need to be successful. I need to do things the right way and operate and be successful, or that's not fair to the people that are going to come after me.

My son is nine years old and he's going to be a GM. That's what he told me already. I need to make sure I operate a



certain way and I do things the right way so he's going to have a great opportunity when it's his time.

Look, I appreciate that. I definitely understand that, but I see it as more of a challenge and an opportunity, as opposed to an accomplishment.

Q. I have a simple question about a complex topic but these are phrases you hear a lot about drafting philosophy. Do you believe in drafting the best player available or drafting more so based on a team's needs?

TERRY FONTENOT: Are you a pretty good guitar player, acoustic.

Q. Very poor guitar player, but I like it.

TERRY FONTENOT: So yeah, good question, and I definitely believe that it's our job to -- you never want to reach for needs. I think it's cool listening to Ozzie Newsome tell stories about certain players on the board and certain areas, and they took the best player available and he ends up taking Hall of Fame players as opposed to reaching for a need.

I would say we never want to reach for needs. We want to stack the board and be consistent. It's never a bad thing to add to a strength. You want to get good football players, because it's a long season, there's a lot of injuries, a lot of things happen, a lot of challenges.

So you never want to, at any position, you want to continue to add competition and you want to get the best players that fit the makeup standard, that fit the physical talent, that fit the skill set. We have a clear vision for what they are going to be and you definitely want to take those, the best player available.

Q. This is a question I had in play already but wanted to follow-up on something you said about what Vaughn had mentioned but what -- mentioned earlier. Do you feel pressure to maybe even perform at a high level to pave the way for more diverse candidates to get that strong consideration for those front office roles in the future?

TERRY FONTENOT: I focus on the process in everything we do. So not just the immediate results, I focus on the process. I believe success is doing things the right way, continuing to learn, continue to adapt and if you do that and you're consistent, then you're going to be successful long term.

I look at it more like I have to operate the right way. I have

to do things the right way and make sure I'm going through the right process and so regardless of right away if you have immediate success or I believe success is going to come if you continue to operate and do things the right way. That's where more of my focus is to be disciplined and not to change my core beliefs and my core philosophies, to handle things the right way and that's where I believe success will come.

Q. You mentioned the culture of competition. What did you see with the Falcons organization that showed you that those building blocks were already here for the franchise?

TERRY FONTENOT: I believe it starts with the owner, and it's not just the owner, but everybody I've been involved with throughout this process, I could tell this is a really good building. There are some really good people here. Look, the tough part is there are changes when you have changes in leadership, there are changes, but I know there's some really good people in this building and there's a standard here as well, a standard to succeed and operate and do things the right way.

I know we're going to have the support and resources and it's my job -- I want players to feel like when they come in this building, everybody in the bidding is going to do everything they can to help them develop as men and as players. They need to feel like that.

When a coach comes in this building, they need to feel like everybody in this building is going to do everything they can to help them be the best coach. Every one of our scouts need to feel like, man, Terry is going to get me every resource and do everything he can to make sure I can be a good scout. Everyone needs to feel like that throughout the building.

But again, starting with ownership, throughout the organization, I just believe this is a really good place in this city, in Atlanta, it's a place that they are starving for and they are ready for.

Q. Curious on your philosophy of evaluating players, analytics or seeing guys in person?

TERRY FONTENOT: It's a layer of information and I believe that's how it needs to be utilized, as a layer of information. You also need to be a culture of innovation and always looking, and not just -- that's in the scouting department, that's in the coaching department, that's with the training staff that's in the training room. That's in every area.

I really believe that it's a mindset. It's a mindset. If you



have a mindset for growth and to listen, as opposed to a stubborn mindset where you don't want to change, you don't want to adapt, we need to make sure we have the right mindsets, and we are detailed and we do enough research so we are not asking Arthur and Rich for every toy that comes out. We need to make sure that we do enough extensive research so when we say, this is really going to help us, this is going to help us in this particular area, whatever department it's in, that we feel like it really well but it's a mindset for continued growth and it's more about that. You're never going to make decisions solely off of analytics but it is a layer of information.

Q. What did the girls say when you went to the Falcons --

TERRY FONTENOT: Come see -- so this is -- how about this -- look at that. My wife's wearing black.

And it was a really emotional day on Sunday and all the kids, they understood, they knew that dad might have an opportunity in Atlanta, but after that game, it was really emotional.

So there were a little bit of waterworks and everybody was a little emotional, but they were so excited about this opportunity, and they really felt it and they were excited about moving forward. Like they have bled black and gold since they were born. When I started with the saint I wasn't even married yet and now I'm leaving with four kids and they were all born into it and they bleed black and gold and now they bleed black and red and they are ready to come support dad and be part of the city.

Q. Who is your favorite player?

L. FONTENOT: Julio Jones.

Q. When you look at the Falcons, what do you see? Do you see a 4-12 team that needs a rebuild? What do you see when you look at the 2020 Falcons?

TERRY FONTENOT: Again, we understand the challenge because there are some talented players on the roster, but we know where we are with the salary cap and understand, hey, we are going to have to make some difficult decisions like a lot of teams in the NFL. We understand that. But it's not -- it's not the right time obviously or ever the right time to make predictions. I think we just have to keep our head down, focus on the process, make sure we get the right people in the building, make sure we are detailed in terms of the process and we are focusing on the right areas.

We want to add, again, smart, tough, competitive players, get the right people on the bus and we want to be a

competitive football team. We always want to be competitive. We are never going to sit here and say we're not going to be competitive. That's what we want to do.

But also understand, we are going to do it the right way and we want to have sustained success. There's talents and areas we need to add. Not a time for predictions but we want to be a competitive football team.

Q. When you look at the team, what stands out to you as the biggest need right now?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's not something I'm ever going to do, I promise, because one thing I would do sometimes or all the time, I watch any press conference. Any time a personnel or general manager, I watch every press conference because I want to know what they think about their team. And we develop a must, needs, wants list for every team. Because sometimes you can assess a team from where you stand and say, I think they need this, but when there's a general manager or personnel director or a coach talking about exactly what they need on a press conference, that's not something I'm ever going to do.

I respect the question but I'm not going to talk about details.

Q. I heard the talk about the box of goody the for you, but did you have to buy that red tie?

TERRY FONTENOT: I did. I had a red tie somewhere in my house, I promise, this is a true story. So I had I read tie somewhere in my house and I could not find it anywhere and I'm looking everywhere because why would I have a red tie, right. And I asked my wife to go buy a tie because I'm trying to get some other things organized and I came back and hated the tie she bought and I didn't want it. I went to the store and I went to Dillard's and I got a red tie, and I'm tying it in the store right before I got here where I was going to do the press conference and the funny thing about it, 18 years ago, when I had my first interview with the Saints.

So I was at Tulane University, a fifth-year senior and basically my -- one of the people in our football department said they are hiring -- let's get over and interview. So I went to Dillard's, the same Dillard's, on Lakeside and I bought a tie and I wasn't even good at tying it so I'm tying my tie and the lady came, one of the workers came to help me get the tie just right and it was 18 years ago so I got chills when I was in Dillard's today tying my tie and I'm in the mirror it hit me that 18 years ago I was in this same pot.

Q. Procedural type thing. Do you believe you in as a GM making yourself available to media during the



season?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's something I have to get everybody's thoughts. My belief at this point is that the head coach should be the -- he should give the message during the season. He should be the singular voice during the season.

Now in the off-season, I believe you'll get the head coach and you'll get the GM but I believe there should be one voice during the season, the head coach.

Now, I understand with that there's radio shows and other -- but in terms of press conferences weekly or anything like that, I believe it should be -- the message should come from the head coach and he should be the singular voice during the season. But that's not something I've had extensive conversations with Rich or Arthur about.

Q. I'm going to do you a solid here and you don't have to issue your first no comment by me asking you directly about Julio Jones or Matt Ryan but I'm going to back door question a little bit. As you evaluate your roster and where you are in the draft and what the Draft is strong in, how much do you factor in the Draft part as you look to rebuild your roster in terms of the opportunity that you have in front of you?

TERRY FONTENOT: As you assess your team, you're not just looking at this year. You're looking at years to come as you assess your team and as you get into the Draft, to the earlier question, I really believe that in the draft, you're going to take the best player, and you can't be afraid to take -- you need to continue to take every position. There's not a position that you're going to say, oh, we're good there, we are not going to draft there this year. That's just what I believe. If you have conviction and along with the coaches, you're in line and you have a clear vision on what that player is going to be for you, then don't be afraid to draft that player regardless of what position they are at.

Look, I know those two players are really good players, and I understand that, but we are never going to be afraid to take a player at any position and build a strength.

Q. Most of your background is on the pro personnel side. How much does that, if at all, do you feel handicapped in the draft? Are you going to retain any of the college staff? There was talk about maybe trying to bring Harley with you from the Saints?

TERRY FONTENOT: Again, I don't think it's fair to talk about anybody specific on the staff. I haven't even got a chance to meet with the personnel staff or many people in the building so I wouldn't want to talk about anybody

specific.

But I do believe that, like you said, there have been GMs from a pro background that have been very specific and guys specifically at a college program that have been successful or specifically the salary cap, there's all different types. I believe it's about hiring the right people. Having the self-awareness to know your strengths and know areas you want to make sure you get help in hiring the right people and having the humility to hire people smarter than you and listen to them and empower. I think that's critical.

But I believe we'll be very strong in the draft process. We'll be very strong with what we do at the salary cap and we'll be very strong in pro in all areas of player procurement, we're going to be strong because I make sure we have really strong people in place this all those areas.

Q. I'm amazed you've scouted D-Lead. Obviously Mickey Loomis means a lot to you, you choked up with you started thinking about it, I don't know how you can condense what he's meant to you and have you had the conversation with him about, okay, now I'm going to try to kick your butt at least twice a year?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, look, and again that's the hard part. If I was working for an AFC we would have a different relationship. I understand that. I think we'll always have a good personal relationship. I just understand that I'm not going to get the same advice and if I get any advice from him, I shouldn't use it.

Look, that was even something to think about when I'm thinking about the Falcons job because I understand relationships will change. They just have to change with me taking this Falcons job. But I believe personally he's always -- look, he's meant so much to me. When I talk about humility and listening, Mickey is one of those people that he's always the smartest person in the room but he doesn't talk much because he's not going to -- where you have other people that are constantly talking because Mickey is always listening, he's always taking things in, he's always observing.

But when I talk about humility and servant leadership, those are some of the better lessons I learned from him. I believe we'll always have a good personal relationship but I know our professional relationship will just be different.

Q. Can I ask you how many boxes of Saints stuff is the Fontenot family going to be donating?

TERRY FONTENOT: One of my daughter's history teachers said, "I want all of your Saints stuff." That's the hard part. 80 percent of our wardrobes, my car, my phone,

when you realize you've been somewhere this long, some of my credit cards, it's all Saints stuff. Like as I turn everything in, when I talked earlier coming on Thursday, I said I need to get there because I need to get a computer and a phone because I have to turn in all my Saints stuff tomorrow. Yeah, that's an interesting part of it.

Q. You threw me and everybody on the call when you called Darryl D-Lead. Going back to Mickey Loomis, what was the first thing that you either called or texted him when you told him you were going to take the Falcons job?

TERRY FONTENOT: In the back of his mind, he understood because he felt like the Falcons were going to offer me the job, so we had had conversations about it. He kind of understood.

Again he's a good enough person to where he cares about the Saints team, but yet I believe he cares more about me and cares more about me as a person and my growth and my development and my family. So even though I believe he's excited for me, even though it's a division opponent, even though I'm leaving New Orleans, he was still excited for me. He told me that. He said he was proud of me and he's excited about the opportunity I have.

Q. From the perspective of the opponent, looking at the Falcons over the last five years when you were with the Saints, what stood out most to you?

TERRY FONTENOT: Obviously the receivers stress you out. Most teams have only one No. 1 receiver but when you have to go out there and figure out a plan for those receivers, that stresses you out because you can't double everybody on the field. But again I don't want to really get into the roster, but it's not rocket science to say the Falcons have really good receivers.

Q. How is your extensive family dealing with this? Will they ever wear those clothes?

TERRY FONTENOT: It's a great question, and it's funny, because you realize how close your family is because blood is thicker than water. I'm telling you, we have a lot of Louisiana Falcons fans right now.

Q. Obviously not specifically getting into the veteran or Pro Bowl type players you have on this roster, but do you think you have to make a decision whether you're building around your core players or rebuilding or is there such thing as in between?

TERRY FONTENOT: I think that's all part of the process. It's all part of going through the details, again, with a

mindset of thinking big picture, not just focusing on the moment but thinking big picture but it's all part of it.

I don't feel like you're ever in a position where regardless of what you need to do and the moves you need to make, you are always working your best to get very competitive in the game so you're always looking to add players with the right makeup and understanding, hey, they can't all be high-paid free agents and can't all be top draft picks. But we have to hit on these mid to late round picks. We have to hit on these undrafted free agents. We have to hit on these lower-paid players making sure we are in line with the coaches and bringing in good players and we're going to focus on the details and we're going to work hard to do that.

So yeah, I understand, look, sometimes you have to make difficult decisions but you're always working hard to be as competitive as you can as a football team.

Q. It was a thorough interview process with Mr. Blank, but what was your pitch to him? Why did you think you were the best man for the job?

TERRY FONTENOT: When I say this, I'm being honest: First thing I said, "I'm not pitching. My goal isn't to go get a general manager job."

I was just very honest and very transparent in terms of when I talk about my career, when I talk about my core beliefs, when I talk about my philosophies and I was just very clear and detailed in who I am as a person and who I am as a professional and who I am as a worker and what I believe. That's really what I focus on, so I was clear and transparent because, look, you can get caught up, if you tell people what they want to hear on the interview because you're trying to get the job then it's not going to be the right situation for you.

So I didn't want to do that. Sometimes I might have said things that, whether it was the Falcons or another team, things they might not want to hear but I wanted to be clear and transparent, so that the team that wanted to give me an opportunity really felt good about me and they knew exactly what I was getting from that organization.

So it wasn't a pitch to sell myself. It was just me being honest and transparent and saying who I was and what I've been a part of and I didn't would be excited if the opportunity was right.

Q. Whenever the world returns to normal, what are you and your family looking forward to do here in Atlanta?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's a good point. Like I said we're coming here in a few days. I said this to somebody the other day that Flowery Branch it better be child proof because my crew is there all the time and you hear them before you see them. They are always around.

I know Atlanta is a family organization and I know New Orleans is a family organization and that was probably the hardest part in New Orleans this year, not being able to have the families in the building as much as they usually are.

Look, Atlanta, that's one of the attractive things about Atlanta for coaches and players, it's attractive job not just because of organization but because of leaving in Atlanta there's obviously a lot of good things. We are excited to getting to Atlanta, learning the community and really being a part of it.

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