

# Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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## Arthur Smith Terry Fontenot Draft Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: I'll turn it over to Terry and Arthur at this point.

TERRY FONTENOT: We appreciate you all hanging out and waiting for us. These drafts get late on the East Coast. We're very excited about our pick today. We coveted that player for a long time. His skill set, the talent is clear, what he's going to bring on the field, and also he's a tremendous young man. Every exposure, every opportunity to talk to him and spend time with him, all the research, he's got high character. Exactly what we want to build this program on. He brings that on and off the field.

With that we'll take any questions.

**Q. Can you go through the timeline, when you went from going through the tape to really identifying that moment that you knew he was going to be the pick if he was there?**

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, this whole process, the college scouts, even if the boots on the ground, the first evaluation, which was probably Tom doing the first evaluation, you have the area scout, the national scout, then you get into the directors, then the coaches get involved.

We had very high grades on him even in the previous years. The entire time, like A to Z, he checked all the boxes. Now we go through the process and we evaluate everyone, compare and contrast. This player was identified a long time ago. Every exposure, every opportunity, he checked all the boxes.

**Q. Arthur, Kyle said he's excited to come to the team for a number of reasons, but he said he knows in your offense tight ends get fed. How do you plan to feature Kyle?**

ARTHUR SMITH: We're excited about the player's skill set. He's a unique player. Obviously we'll get him in here,

we'll get him started, then let his role grow for us.

We think we can play him in multiple spots. We view him as an offensive weapon. I guess I do have a little bias towards tight ends, but really he was the best player we felt was available. He checked every box.

**Q. Arthur, how does Kyle Pitts kind of epitomize the evolution of the tight end that we've seen over the last few years?**

ARTHUR SMITH: He's different. Usually when you're taking a tight end, they've been more of a receiver, or they're an in-line guy. They're going to be deficient. Hard the way offenses are playing now. You're either taking an oversized receiver, trying to put him in-line, or you have an in-line guy that you hope to develop enough skill set that you hope he can do something in the passing game.

Kyle is unique. He proved that in Florida. Obviously his growth from 19 to 20. We feel like we can play him in multiple spots. Like all rookies, he has room for growth and development, certain areas he'll work to improve on. By no means do we think he's a finished product, step in and do everything from day one. But we're excited about his potential, what he can bring to the offense.

**Q. Terry, from your perspective, what does drafting Kyle Pitts instead of a quarterback at number four say about the confidence you have in Matt Ryan?**

TERRY FONTENOT: From the very beginning we always had a lot of confidence in Matt Ryan. Really going through and evaluating this entire quarterback class has nothing to do, never had anything to do with a lack of confidence in Matt Ryan.

Say the same thing about any position that we draft, we have confidence in tight ends that are in this building, as well. We're bringing competition and adding to this team, adding to this roster.

We evaluate and continue to evaluate this whole quarterback class. But that was never a lack of confidence in Matt Ryan. Again, we couldn't be more excited about Kyle. We took the best player off the board and we feel real good about it right now.

**Q. Terry, there was talk about possibly trying to trade back. How serious did those conversations get? Where y'all close at any point? Were you still locked in on Kyle?**

TERRY FONTENOT: We had several conversations, and none of them got serious enough. Really we looked at it like it would have had to be a lot, something that would be significant this year and in next year's draft. Had to be enough for us to move off of that player. There weren't any offers that would have been enough to move back.

**Q. This is your first-ever pick in these positions. Terry, you said there wasn't going to be any nerves. When you're sitting there at four, what is going through both of y'all's heads?**

TERRY FONTENOT: It was really excitement. We felt that this was going to be the player, that this player would be there. Yet right when you get in that moment, you never know what could happen.

Once it was real, we knew that was the player, we still answered the phone and made sure there wasn't anything that was going to be a lot to move off of the player.

It's extremely exciting to have, again, the first overall pick, to know that kind of young man, the character, what he is, the toughness, the competitiveness, off the field, the human being he is, that rare skill set. 20 years old.

Like Arthur said, he's going to come here and go to work and he's going to get better with this coaching staff and all the resources in this building. We're going to get the most out of him. He has the makeup to reach his ceiling, which is extremely high.

That was really exciting when you have a player that you have so much confidence in. Again, not just the player, but the man.

ARTHUR SMITH: The best thing about it is we felt really prepared going in. A little bit like going to a game, you're calling plays. If you're prepared, you feel confident. You have your contingency plans if something else happens in front of us that wasn't expected.

Like Terry said, you answer the phone, make sure you're not getting a deal we have to think about to move. We were confident with the pick. The pick goes in.

There's a lot of great preparation by the entire football staff, scouting and coaching staff, so we felt great about it.

**Q. Terry, do you right now have a succession plan in**

**place for Mott Ryan?**

TERRY FONTENOT: We're still working through that. There are still quarterbacks in this draft. Again, even outside of the draft, after the draft, even going into the year, there's times that there can still be trades.

Right now we only have one quarterback on the roster, so the answer to that question is no. But I would say we're still working through that process.

**Q. There's still a chance you might draft a quarterback or you might acquire one? I meant, someone who you would perceive as the potential future starter for this team?**

TERRY FONTENOT: There's still a chance we could definitely draft a quarterback. We got a long way to go. I believe there's some good quarterbacks in the draft. There's definitely still a chance we could draft a quarterback.

Again, we can get out of the draft and there can be a trade. There's still a lot of other opportunities to acquire quarterbacks and to fill out the roster the right way.

**Q. Can either of you speak about what you thought about Justin Fields as you evaluated him?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Now that he's with the Bears... Obviously there's been a ton of players that went in the first round. I don't feel like that's fair to Justin or the Bears. Let the Bears or Justin speak about that. There were a lot of players we liked in this draft.

**Q. What made Kyle the best player available at four?**

TERRY FONTENOT: What do you think? What do you think about him?

**Q. I heard he hits like you did at Tulane.**

TERRY FONTENOT: You're taking a dig at me (laughter).

**Q. Coach said you used to get after it. That's why I think he was the one.**

TERRY FONTENOT: You know it's funny because Arthur Blank tonight was telling us one night we're going to bring in all our college tape and he's going to make us watch all our college film. It's funny you said that.

You just look at his skill set. His size, the athleticism, the body control, the way he separates, the way he adjusts to the ball. Again, he's a tough, competitive player. He's a



mismatch. He's 20 years old. He's got a high ceiling. He's still getting better.

He does have a rare skill set. I keep emphasizing it, but the makeup that he has, the makeup that the young man has, we know what we're bringing into this building. That's what gets us so excited about him.

**Q. Who would you say Kyle is like during your time spending a lot of time with tight ends?**

ARTHUR SMITH: He's like Kyle Pitts. I'm not into comparison. It's not fair to Kyle, other guys. We want Kyle Pitts to be the best version of Kyle Pitts. Kind of like I touched on yesterday, I just don't believe in the comparisons. It's not fair to the player because you put unnecessary expectations on somebody or set narratives that are not true.

I think this guy is unique. He's a unique player. We are excited to get a chance to work with him.

**Q. How are you feeling about heading into the picks you have coming up in the second and third round?**

TERRY FONTENOT: We feel good. We feel really excited. It's cool having a pick so early tomorrow because we can really anticipate what's going to be there, really have those discussions tonight and even into tomorrow because we know what to expect.

It feels good picking that early. We feel good we're going to get another good player that fits our culture. We'll get two, maybe three players tomorrow. We're excited.

**Q. Terry, one of the best lines I saw tonight on Twitter was a GM said he wouldn't take a tight end that high, but he's a bad dude, referring to Kyle. Does he have swagger? He's so polished and nice, but do you see an angry side with him?**

TERRY FONTENOT: He's a tough, competitive player. When you watch the tape, that's what you like about him. Obviously you see the plays that he makes as a receiver, but he's also, again, a tough, competitive guy. He has a makeup off the field, but it translates to the field, as well.

**Q. Arthur, everybody talks about obviously his strength, his versatility. As a coach, what is one area where you see he can make his biggest growth?**

ARTHUR SMITH: There's a lot of areas. He's transitioning into the NFL. We're high on him, that's why we took him. There's a lot of areas. When we get the player in here, we obviously know what he did in college. We feel confident

in some of the skill sets with the route running. He was very aggressive, willing. Like I said, all these rookies are going to have to come in here, we have to do our job and help them improve.

**Q. Terry, what were your emotions like as you got on the clock there your first time making your draft pick?**

TERRY FONTENOT: It was exciting. It really was. Again, we anticipated it. We expected. Look, that's kudos to the college guys, the college staff, because I would say really even after the pick, the board came off kind of how we expected it. In the first round at least, things kind of happened how we expected it. Things happened how we expected early on.

We expected him to be there. We answered the call, all that. Once you're really in the moment, it's really happening, it was really exciting. It was really exciting because we know we're getting a player that we hold in high regard. It's been for a while. We're very excited about that player, going through the whole process. Excited about him, the man. In that moment when you realize we're really getting the player we love, we felt real good about it.

**Q. You talked about wanting to pick an impact player. You obviously did that. With the first overall pick at number four, do you expect Pitts to be a starter for you next season?**

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, sure. He's going to play. That's the anticipation. He's going to have to earn those reps.

The way we'll play in multiple personnel groups, again, if you're going by who is out there the very first play of the game, that's going to be different every week depending on what we decide the best way to attack that team is.

Yes, we anticipate he'll have a huge role here. Sometimes people get caught up in the starter. There are guys that are really good players, these natural streaks have gone on. Look at what we did in Tennessee, we had certain players, even veterans. When you got the right, unselfish guys...

I go back to my own experience working with somebody like Delanie Walker. I call the first play of the game, he might not be in there. He's going to be in there 70% of our snaps or more. He never cared.

We anticipate he should have a big role for us.

**Q. What is the plan to address the offensive line? Will**

## we see that over the next two days?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's possible. Sure. When Jeff asked about a succession plan at quarterback, you have to have a succession plan everywhere we got coming down the road for '21. Then obvious there's players if it goes to free agency. You're always looking to add at multiple spots. There's multiple ways to address that.

Obviously the draft is right here in front of us, the easiest way. We don't want to reach for somebody. As the spring goes on, the rhythm of the NFL off-season, there's players that are available. There's certainly trades that you can make.

We'll look to do that at every spot to constantly turn this roster and improve. You have to. That's our charge and that's our job.

TERRY FONTENOT: I would piggyback on that and really agree with what Arthur said. The roster building goes outside of free agency, outside of the draft. It's a continuous process whether we're signing veterans after the draft, based off what other teams do, what other teams draft. There could be players available via trade or players that get let go, get cut.

You go all the way through the summer, you go in training camp. I can think of years where we're going to be high in the claiming order. You can claim players. There are going to be a lot of opportunities to continue to build this roster. We want to make sure we have discipline over the next two days and take the best players off the board. We'll continue to build a roster.

ARTHUR SMITH: To give you an example. I was on the other side of it recently. Not to say this is going to happen this year in training camp. Trades happen in training camp. Think about what Andy Levitre got here. Andy did a heck of a job here, had a great career with the Falcons.

Those things pop. You got to constantly (indiscernible) the phones, see what's available. But you're always looking. Obviously the quarterback spot is critical. But you're looking at it year to year, and the rest of the roster. There's multiple ways to acquire players.

### **Q. Terry, first round is over, but how heavily did y'all really consider a quarterback at four, something you considered or was that a little bit of smoke?**

TERRY FONTENOT: There's no smoke. I mean, from us, we basically, like we said we did the entire time, we're going to evaluate the entire quarterback class, we're going to evaluate all the players. That's what we did. That's

important to do that.

There was never any smoke. I mean, there's stuff that you can read all these other places. But that doesn't come from us. Me and Arthur, we just do our jobs, our coaches do their jobs. People put stuff out there. But we're never involved in any of that.

We evaluated the players, and that's our job to go through that process. We believe we took the best player off the board. We feel really good about it.

ARTHUR SMITH: The reason it makes me laugh, there's no smoke coming from Terry and I. You evaluate everything. There's a lot of players we liked in this draft, I should say the first round of this draft, that were picked tonight. That doesn't come from Terry and I.

As you guys know, there's a lot of people think they have access to information, they got a little piece of it, want to run with it. These rumors take a life of their own. It's the social media world we live in. That doesn't come from Terry and I.

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