

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Terry Fontenot Arthur Smith

Draft Press Conference



THE MODERATOR: We'll start with questions.

Q. Just five things. McCarron, picked him up today. The trade in the second round. Comment on Mayfield. Then looking ahead to tomorrow.

TERRY FONTENOT: Is that everything?

Q. That's all I need, can get to Happy Hour.

TERRY FONTENOT: We're very excited about Richie Grant. He's a high-character, tough, smart, competitive, extremely passionate player. I'm sure you guys watched some of his tape. He's a fun guy to watch, throws his body around, takes the ball away. He's versatile, fits the ethos. He's going to be a fun player.

Obviously the value of getting a player that we wanted, but also picking up four tomorrow, we're excited to have two picks tomorrow, top 10 in the round. It's going to be good picking up that draft pick.

Then talking about Jalen, big, massive man. He's athletic, versatile. He's smart, tough, competitive. Again, another guy that we're excited about what he's going to bring on the offensive line. Really excited about those two players.

The quarterback, obviously excited to have A.J. here. We still need to continue to add to that position, but we're excited to have A.J.

Q. With Jalen, when you evaluated him, is he a tackle to you or a guard? How do you see him moving forward in terms of your plans?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, no, he played tackle at Michigan. There's a lot of guys that can make that transition. We feel good. He can possibly be a four-position player. But he'll come in there and compete, compete inside. We're excited about the pick.

Q. Similarly, with Richie, he said that he thinks he will be a free safety, but has the ability to play in the box. Terry, when you guys were evaluating him, what are those traits that really stood out that showed that he could contribute however in the defense?

ARTHUR SMITH: Can I answer this quick, first?

So you understand, we play a very versatile package on defense. Once Richie gets here, he'll realize he'll have multiple roles. It's a transition. We'll have multiple packages. He'll play multiple roles. It's not just going to be free and box safety. We'll bring Richie along. He'll find a role.

TERRY FONTENOT: To Arthur's point, when Dean talks about safeties, you're not going to hear Dean say a strong safety, box safety, or a back end. The safeties have to be versatile, they have to be able to do everything.

That's what we really like about the player because he can play down in the box, he can pressure, he's a viable tackler, physical, tough, throw his body around the box. He can play on the back end and anticipate throws and take the ball away. Also his freshman year he had 11 special teams tackles. He's a guy that he's a four-down player. He has true versatility. We love the passion that he plays with.

Q. Terry, I was thinking about these first three picks. What stood out to me the most is the theme of versatility. You take a tight end that people call a unicorn for a reason, a safety that has tape all over the secondary, an offensive lineman who literally told us an hour ago, Put me at any of the five spots on the line. Why are y'all drawn to these type of players in this draft? The second part is, who in the organization has the eye to see these skill sets in these guys?

TERRY FONTENOT: It's kind of like we talked about early on. This is our draft, right? This is our draft. This is our process. A lot of people put a lot of work into this. So from the coaching staff, working along with the college scouts, everyone having a voice, that's really important.

As we talk through these players, there's a very clear vision for what we want them to be here. That is important. We

want smart, tough, versatile football players that can do a lot of different things.

You're right, when you look at these three players, they can really check a lot of boxes on and off the field.

Q. How much did y'all know about Richie Grant already having been around and hung out with Erik Harris over the off-season working out?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's funny. Erik told Dean about it. The same thing with Calvin and Pitts. That was another one, as well.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, Erik sent me a text after the pick and said how excited he was about it. He said, That's my little brother, we train every day. That was kind of cool. I personally didn't know until that point. Arthur was telling me today how Ridley and Pitts had been training together. I think that's pretty cool.

Q. Coach Smith, with Jalen not having a whole lot of tape from the most recent season because of his injury, what did you see from him in the games that he did play that allowed you to have the confidence that you'd be willing to take a player you didn't have a full three seasons worth of tape on?

ARTHUR SMITH: I mean, you just look at his body of work. You had enough film in '19. Another player that's young. He was out there, like he alluded to.

We felt good. Everybody had different reasons. It's a tough year for a lot of these kids in college football. Some kids obviously played a lot more games than others. You had kids that were told their season was not going to happen, then it was happening, they came back. Everybody had a different, unique story. You can't hold that against them.

We felt very comfortable with Jalen. Jalen's body of work, all the digging that the entire scouting department and coaching staff did, everybody that we talked to.

Q. Terry, what do you think about the edge rushers? They're still available. And the runningbacks?

TERRY FONTENOT: I'm not going to give you the players that we are taking. Is that what you want to do (smiling)?

Q. Any good edge rushers and runningbacks on the board?

TERRY FONTENOT: There are. There's some good edge rushers, some good runners. That's really the cool thing

about picking, now we have two picks right at the top. We can really talk about, say, five or six players and expect two or three of them to be there when we're picking. That's the real exciting part about it going into the day. We can anticipate who we expect to be there, really discuss them.

But there are some good players at a lot of different positions. We're going to get two really good players that really fit us tomorrow.

Q. Arthur, you obviously have a bunch of experience on the offensive line. Realistically how long can it take for Jalen Mayfield to adjust potentially to the interior having never played a snap there in college? What's a realistic plan for him?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's hard to give a timeline. You just never know. I mean, it's a hard enough transition to make as a rookie. The most recent experience with a guy, you just bring them along, completely different player, but when we drafted Nate Davis. He got injured in training camp. We brought him along. We actually put him in the first time when we played here in Atlanta. He ended up starting the rest of the season.

It's a tough job to go in there, even if you're just taking him from his college position to where you're going to play him in the pro. Even if you're keeping him at right tackle, putting him at left tackle. No different when we took LaJuan. We had Michael. Put LaJuan at left guard. They're all different.

You can't make a snap judgment off of one week in training camp. The good news is he played at Michigan, he played in big games, gone against big-time competition. We feel confident in the way he learns. We'll see when he gets here how he works, where he fits from there.

Q. Terry, two of the three guys you've taken, if my math is correct, are 20. How much is age a factor here? Does that factor in at all that these guys are maybe a little bit younger from a development standpoint or really anything?

TERRY FONTENOT: Kyle is 20, Jalen is actually 21. But, yeah, those guys are young. I would say it's just about the maturity.

Kyle, he's 20 years old, but, man, he's about the most grounded, just professional. I know you guys have gotten a chance to hear him talk, at least seen him communicate a little bit. You understand what I'm saying.

You can have a player that's 20 with that type of maturity. You can have a player that's 23 and is a complete

opposite. We spend a lot of time with these players. It's more exciting to me when a player is young and already we feel good about where they are personally because then there's just a ceiling, you have so much upside with that player.

Q. On the commonality of the three players, can each of you just sort of express specifically what you look for in players? Beyond the measurables of big, tall, strong, fast, whatever, specifically what do you believe makes great football players?

TERRY FONTENOT: Talking about in those positions?

Q. Just in general as you're building a team. It could be specific positions, sure.

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, if you're talking about, say, for instance, a safety, what gets you excited about Richie is if you're a safety, you have to play with some toughness. We want players that are tone setters for your team, not just players that can tackle, but players that strike. You want physicality. You want instincts. You want to see players take the ball away. That's instincts and anticipation and ball skills and aggression.

When you're talking about a safety, you have to be smart right down the middle of the field. You're looking for instincts, intelligence. There are intangibles at that position. It's not just about the height, weight, speed. There's certain intangible qualities that you need for, say, like Richie as a safety.

When you're talking about an offensive lineman, you hear Arthur say that sets the tone for your team. You have to have toughness, grit, and competitive. You have to have that in offensive linemen, despite what your traits are.

A tight end, there has to be a mismatch capability. Arthur is going to be able to scheme up a lot of stuff for people to be open. At some point somebody has to win. You need that ability to win matchups.

ARTHUR SMITH: Obviously they have to fit the minimum job requirement. If you're an offensive lineman, it's obvious. You have to be able to block your guy. That's the minimum here.

What we're looking at is fit, some of the schemes we will run. You're looking at it different where they are in their career, how much development you think they can realistically come in here and improve.

With a guy like Jalen, we feel very confident in the development program we'll have him in. His speed, his

quickness off the ball, can he change directions, keep the guy in front of him in pass protection, can he get into the line of scrimmage, how much power does he have, can he displace the defender up front.

Then we look at tight ends. Come in all shapes and sizes. What you're going to ask them to do? If you're going to actually realistically break the guy from the core, can he beat man coverage. If he can't, that's what you're going to get the majority of third downs, then you're wishing and hoping. If you feel confident about that, yeah, realistically spread them out.

If you're looking for a big, blocking tight end, it's pretty similar to a lineman where he can at least give you something in the passing game.

Then Richie, if you're going to be a multiple defense, you got to value versatility. It just depends what you're looking for. A lot of different schemes that have been successful, we clearly will value versatility here because we're going to be a team that's going to game plan week to week. We plan to be multiple. Same thing offensively.

That's why we value versatility.

Q. Terry, what you said about A.J. McCarron, you still have interest in more help at the position. I was interested in the timing of this announcement coming between the first and second rounds. I'm kind of left to conclude or wonder if things had gone a different way in the first round, maybe you wouldn't have made this announcement today. Is that accurate?

TERRY FONTENOT: What do you think?

ARTHUR SMITH: I don't know. I guess, Charles (smiling).

Q. To what degree did that signing take away the urgency?

TERRY FONTENOT: We don't strategically think of stuff like that. We just do it, announce it. C'mon, man, you're giving us way too much credit (laughter).

THE MODERATOR: Thanks for joining late night.

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