

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Arthur Smith Terry Fontenot Draft Press Conference



ARTHUR SMITH: Just wanted to acknowledge the hard work of the personnel department and coaching staff and the collaborative effort we had that got us up to this point in the Draft. And really the scouting department, there's a lot of guys that don't get a lot of credit that do a lot of the work that brings the players in here. You guys see the result of it. We're selecting on Draft day, and hopefully we get a pretty good post-Draft class as well.

Especially a year like this when we've had a transition, completely new personnel department from the top down, and with the coaching side and a lot of guys that were held over in transition, they're going from two different systems, an old scouting system to a new scouting system, old schemes, new schemes, and they did a lot of really, really good work for us. I just want to take time to thank those guys and appreciate the work they did.

With that, we'd like to open it up for questions.

Q. Terry and coach, how do you all feel with the six picks today, four defense and two offense?

TERRY FONTENOT: Extremely excited about the six picks today and the nine picks overall. I think we have an exceptional group of young men, and there's a lot of what you look for from coaches, from the scouts is passion and conviction. You want to bring in players that you love, and we love this Draft class.

We're obviously working on the undrafted -- we'll start working on the undrafted free agents, and we'll love that class as well. We're extremely excited about this class. If you look top to bottom at every single player, you're going to see smart, tough, high character, and versatile, guys that can be multiple and do different things for us. Very excited about the class overall.

Q. For coach, the linemen you got yesterday, with Jalen and Drew today, where will you start them out

at?

ARTHUR SMITH: Again, they'll play multiple spots. We'll have good competition inside. Whether we put them out at tackle or put them inside, and Dalman can pull the football. So we'll have good competition. The best guys will start and earn their job. That's the best thing we could do here is to add competition and depth.

Q. This is for either. With Drew in particular, what did you like about him, in scouting him and evaluating him? And just kind of what do you think he brings to this offense?

ARTHUR SMITH: He brings some versatility inside. He's a very smart, instinctive player. You can't have enough guys that have the ability to pull the football. We value that, that center/guard flexibility, obviously, with someone like Jalen who has tackle/guard flexibility. With Drew, he was a very productive player at center.

We'll have healthy competition, and the best players will play, and the ones that don't, they've got to have versatility if you want to get the helmet on game day. We feel those guys will bring the competition and will have every opportunity to play.

TERRY FONTENOT: We only have ten in the Draft room. The coaches and coordinators aren't in the room, but they're right down the hall. We could hear Dwayne Ledford yelling and throwing stuff around his office every time we draft an offensive lineman. So he's pretty pumped.

ARTHUR SMITH: Kind of random fact, talk about life coming full circle. Dwayne Ledford was talking about how Drew's dad, Chris, helped him in San Francisco when he made the transition to center, and I think it's pretty cool he gets the opportunity to work with his son. And also Chris was here and coaching under Jim Mora's staff.

Q. Did those factors at all, whether it was Dwayne, whether it was just knowing Chris, his history in the NFL, did that help put him on your radar? How did that process go where he was there for you guys and you guys ended up taking him?



ARTHUR SMITH: It's all taken into account. It's part of his -- obviously, his background and bio, but that's not why he's put on the radar. His play on the field is why he was on our radar. You're not going to reach -- it doesn't matter how good your father was at the position, but Drew earned it in his own right, and that's why he was on a lot of people's boards where he was.

Q. The two defensive linemen you guys added today, what do you think they bring to the defense?

ARTHUR SMITH: I don't want to sound like a broken record here. They're big. They've got length. They can play multiple spots. Whether they play outside on face downs or five technique, good versatility, good length. The other thing you're looking for too, if you're not going to be a starter on day one, you've got to play on fourth down. We feel like those guys can find value or find a spot there as well.

TERRY FONTENOT: He said big. 35-plus inches in length, these guys are long, two power forwards. They're definitely big, and we're excited about those guys.

Q. And then with the addition of Avery and obviously Patterson a couple weeks ago, how do you feel about the return competition you're going to have now?

ARTHUR SMITH: Just what you said, it's great competition. Obviously, Patterson has been a dynamic kick returner, and we expect him to be a dynamic kick returner for us, and Avery, he'll have every opportunity to go back there and compete, whether it's punt returns or spot-on defense, maybe offense. He's a very unique player.

TERRY FONTENOT: Marquice said he'll figure it out.

Q. It seemed like today there was a theme of taking team captains. Was that something that went into the evaluation process? And if so, what about that attracted maybe some of those players to you? Is there something to that?

ARTHUR SMITH: Depends what program you're from. Certainly it helps if it's an authentic process, and players, the ones that voted for them, every situation is unique. I just think it's ironic how it worked out. It wasn't like, hey, we're taking this guy over him because he's the team captain. It was just a situation where coaches pick and you have a voting process that may not be really what the vote is.

I don't know. I don't take too much account of that. It's

really what the reputation is you are as a teammate, and sometimes that may be the way it works out. It wasn't like Terry said, hey, take him, he's a team captain, and this guy wasn't.

Q. As far as running back, you all didn't really address that in the Draft. Is that a place where maybe UDFA comes in? Or do you look at another veteran maybe with Mike Davis there. Where do you all feel you stand at that position? Maybe it's a fair question for Terry.

TERRY FONTENOT: We talked about running backs throughout the draft, and we went through it. There were times that running backs were in our clumps and we took a player over them. We discussed running backs throughout the draft. To answer your question, yes, we'll be on the phone with some undrafted players that we covet, and we'll continue to work on bringing in veterans. We discussed it throughout the draft, and it just didn't fall our way.

ARTHUR SMITH: Just one thing you'll realize, from us, the depth chart is never set. You don't all of a sudden, work's over, let's go week 1. You guys know. You guys have been covering this stuff for a long time. At our mindset, every position, we're going to look. If players become available, we'll have discussions about them. Trades certainly can happen, post-June cuts, post-Draft cuts. You're always looking to add depth.

And the great thing is watching Terry operate this weekend. It wasn't like we were going to reach for somebody and overdraft somebody just because we needed to address that when we had better players graded higher at other spots. So it was fun to watch him operate.

Q. For either one of you, as you both looked at film of the players you were inheriting and from last year, I noticed you basically drafted two defensive linemen, two offensive linemen, plus obviously Kyle. Were you sort of focused in on we have to get better up front on both sides of the ball? I know that's standard for football, but just in general, as you looked at tape and moving forward.

TERRY FONTENOT: I'll start off with really the two, when we picked both offensive linemen, they were the best players on the board. Yeah, it's easy. We do say, you come in, and you want to build inside out, and you want to get bigger, and you want to get big, tough guys in the trenches, that's important. But when we pick those players, they were the best players on the board.

So, Jeff, we didn't go through saying, hey, we're going to reach for these players just to get in some offensive linemen and defensive linemen. It really -- those players

were there. We had a lot of passion for them at that time, but we felt like we didn't reach for the players that we took.

You always want to get players on offensive line and the defensive line, but those were the best players when we took them.

Q. And my other question is -- it's kind of along the same line. You drafted nine players. Do you generally have a thought going into the drafts, or even this draft particularly, where you think we're drafting nine players. Let's see if we can get three regulars out of this or four regulars out of this. Just what are your thoughts? Particularly, again, stepping into a new situation with a new team here.

TERRY FONTENOT: Jeff, you're asking more so with of those nine players, you're saying you want this many starters, this many contributors? Is that what you're asking?

Q. Yeah, just any expectation level you have now that the draft is over of this class.

TERRY FONTENOT: With every player, the discussion is always, it starts with how's he going to make the 53? So what's the vision for the player? So if you're talking about developmental player, for instance, okay, what's he going to do on fourth down? What's he going to do in the kicking game if he's developmental? How is he going to get to the active roster? Or is this going to be a player we're going to see on the practice squad?

So every player we're going to discuss what the vision is, what the fit is, how he's going to make the team, and how he's going to contribute. So, yeah, we have clear visions for all those players, and you want to have every player that you draft, you want them to end up making and contributing to your team.

Even as we talk about these undrafted free agents, there's got to be a vision because, if there's not a vision for him either being a contributor or developing into helping you on Sundays, Mondays, Thursdays, whenever we play --

ARTHUR SMITH: Tuesdays.

TERRY FONTENOT: Tuesdays.

ARTHUR SMITH: It's on Tuesday this year.

TERRY FONTENOT: So if we don't have a clear vision for them helping you at some point, then they're not players that you want. But I will say every player that we drafted, we do have visions for those players developing into

contributors or starters.

Q. I know it literally just wrapped up for you guys a few minutes ago, but overall with your first draft experience, what was kind of one moment that you enjoyed the most? And maybe something that you kind of learned like next time I'm going to do it a little bit differently?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's a good question. Give it some thought. What really gets exciting is when you have the players, you put together your clumps of players that you want, and then so you have five players, and there's 15 picks. And you're just watching, and you're hoping. You're trying to make sure. You have superstitions like Kyle Smith -- at one point, I wanted to move the magnets and stack them together. Kyle said, don't touch them. You can't touch the magnets, or they'll go.

So it's kind of cool with all the superstitions, and we go through it, and it's exciting whenever you actually make it to the player and you get the player, and the position coach gets excited. So just that part of it. Because we are in -- we always consider it. We get calls on the clock, or we get calls prior to, and we consider moving back. There's times we love certain players at times, but we want to move back because we want to maximize that pick. Then you do get nervous about someone taking the player. It really does get exciting when those players are there.

And just being on the phone with those players -- like we did, these are some passionate young men that are really excited. When we would -- when you say Atlanta, like you could hear the families in the background cheering. That was really fun. That was really fun. There's some passionate individuals. So I would just say just the angst of waiting to see if the players make it to you and then just the excitement of the coaches, the scouts, and then even the players.

ARTHUR SMITH: For me, the magnet thing was hilarious, but the phone calls are pretty special. When you get to talk to the kid, you hear the family, it's a really cool moment for players and their families, of course. A lot of these guys, everybody's got a very cool story and a unique journey to get here.

When Terry and I get on the phone with them, that's a pretty cool moment for them to hear the excitement.

Q. Obviously, you'll never have any favorites, but what was it like seeing Kyle Pitts, your first first round pick today, come into Flowery Branch, get a tour? What was that like for you guys? Kind of surreal?

ARTHUR SMITH: It was good, but I have to look up at him. He's the size I remember in Florida, so I didn't have to look down on him that day. We got the height wrong. It's always nice when you've got to look up at him.

TERRY FONTENOT: He's a big man. He's a big man, and it was exciting just getting to spend a little bit of time with him. He has a nice, really nice family. But he's a big man.

Q. A follow-up on Avery. Was he drafted primarily for his return skills? And for Arthur, were you just kidding when you said he may offense too?

ARTHUR SMITH: No, I'm not kidding. He could play offense. He's got a role on defense, and I keep hitting the buzz word. He can play -- did I say versatility?

TERRY FONTENOT: He's a Joker.

ARTHUR SMITH: Multiple spots, kind of like the Joker position. Maybe he has New Orleans in him. No, he's just a guy that's going to bring competition. That's what you want. You've got to have guys that can compete and help us move the football in any way possible. We feel Avery has a chance to do that.

Q. And now that you've completed this first draft, how different was it for you to go through this process knowing you've got to be concerned about all parts of offense, defense, special teams, not just one side of the ball?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, it's fun to be a part of it because you're sitting there and watching the strategy as we're going through and talking about guys in certain brackets that we're putting them in waiting, strategically trying to address needs and taking the best players available. But, yeah, it's fun to have to get to worry about the whole team.

TERRY FONTENOT: And the cool thing about Arthur is that's his mindset. I know you can say there's defensive minded head coaches or offensive minded head coaches, but just like the question the other day about coaches needing to win now and GMs concerned about the future. Arthur does not think like that. Even when you talk about the roster, he's concerned about the front seven, the secondary, the offensive line -- all the areas. It's all about the team and doing what's best for the team. He really thinks that way.

So that's what makes those discussions a lot easier because there's not a one-sided mindset with Arthur and the way he thinks.

Q. So this can be for both of you guys. Obviously, you hold all of these players in high regard on the football field, but you talked so much about how you were looking for good players off the field. That's my dog growling, so I apologize. When you're vetting them personality-wise and just as human beings, what are you really looking for when you talk to those players?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, and it's really about we break it into two things, just the personal character, and that's who they are as human beings and what kind of people -- like are they good young men? That's not to say you haven't made mistakes because we all make mistakes. But are they good young men that want to do the right things and they're going to be good teammates, they're going to be on time, they're going to do what they're supposed to do.

Then you get to football character. Do they love ball? Do they have passion? Do they love the weight room? Are they film junkies? Like you want to get into the guys that love ball, and that gets into the tape because you're not going to say this guy's passionate and loves football if he's not flying around every play. So we really believe that we brought in guys that not only are good young men off the field, but they are passionate and really love football.

I'm sure you guys -- I don't know if you spent time with all of them, but when you spend time with them a little bit, you really feel that passion, and we're excited about them bringing that to this organization.

Q. And was there one guy in particular where your personality kind of surprised you a little bit whenever you talked to them for the first time?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, not surprised -- we've talked to these guys, right? So we kind of know what to expect, but right before we called Darby -- so I'm calling Darby, and Arthur said, get ready for this. And he was going nuts on the phone. He was so excited.

He starts telling me about the food that he was cooking there, and he's just -- he was so pumped up. So all the guys were really good on the phone, but he was just a little bit different in a good way.

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