

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

Wednesday, March 23, 2022

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Terry Fontenot

Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: Hi guys. First of all, I want to say we appreciate you all being here. We talked about doing this yesterday, and it was tough to get everybody in one place, but we appreciate your patience and appreciate you taking the time today to be with us.

I'll touch on a few things, Arthur will touch on a few things, and from there we'll open it up to questions. The first thing we want to talk about is, and we all have individual statements on Matt, but just want to be very clear that, man, we're so appreciative of the time we were able to spend with Matt, and I know it was just a year with me and Arthur, but he is just a consummate pro, the ultimate teammate, the ultimate professional. He embodies all the traits and characteristics that you want in a football player. We appreciate him, appreciate his family, and his professionalism and understanding throughout this entire process just means so much to us. He's a special man, and we're rooting for him and his continued success.

We talked about every scenario and every possibility, and we're always looking at long-term future, and so we have to do that. So through the entire off-season, we had discussions on when the right time was to trade Matt, and we talked about the possibility of it. When we looked at that, we wanted him to be involved in that. He has to be involved in it, because he deserves that. He's earned the right to be involved in that.

We would never trade him somewhere and he knows nothing about it and we're just trying to maximize value, and we go through some strung-out process and try to squeeze out all the compensation that we can. We were never going to do that with Matt. He deserves the right, he's earned the right to be involved, so he was. He was involved in this whole process.

Arthur was great communicating with him on a daily basis, and we allowed him to communicate with the team, and it was more important for us to let Matt be involved in it and

get Matt somewhere where he wanted to be as opposed to just trying to maximize the value.

But again, just so appreciative of him and who he is as a man, and that decision was us looking at the long term and trying to do what's right for him and doing what's right for this team when you look at the impact that it'll have on us next year and the situation we're going to be in next year at this point.

I'll get into the off-season a little bit and where we are. We obviously have a lot of work to do, and yet we're excited about some things that we have gotten accomplished. Our first step is always to work hard to re-sign our players. So we were able to get some things done with getting an extension done with Jake Matthews that means a lot to us, getting Younghoe extended, also OZ, getting OZ under contract for this year, and then Zay, Colby Gossett, Anthony Rush. I got a text about 10:45 last night that we've re-signed Erik Harris.

We talk about bringing about our players, and there were some players that we weren't able to get contracts done with and that we worked hard to and went through that process, and they had better opportunities elsewhere, and we wish them all the best.

We try to keep everyone that we can, but in some cases we're not able to do that.

Then from players outside the building, we're excited about Marcus Mariota, and we're going to continue to add to that room, and whether we're talking about free agents, trades, the draft, we're going to continue to add to that room and yet we're excited that Marcus is here.

Lorenzo Carter, we're excited about bringing him home, from Georgia. Also Casey Hayward, really two Georgia boys that are coming back home, and they're really excited to be here and play for the Falcons. Damien Williams, Elijah Wilkinson, Teez Tabor, some other players that we've been able to sign.

Our pro department is really working hard and we appreciate them, Chris and Kirsten working hard on the

contracts.

We've got a lot of work to do in some particular areas. Obviously receiver there's some things we need to get accomplished prior to the draft with pro players, and we're going to work hard to continue to do that. But I really appreciate the work that has been put in up to this point.

Then the college process, we're right in the middle of that right now. We're going to as soon as we finish up here get on a plane and go to Oxford and watch Ole Miss's pro day. We'll be in Cincinnati tomorrow. Our college scouts have just been hitting the ground hard, and we'll be at pro days and personal workouts really for the rest of this month. We get into our April meetings on April 4th and we'll start going through that process.

We have nine draft picks right now, and we have significant draft capital, and that's a big part of it. When you look at the cap space that we're going to have next year and look at the draft capital that we have, it's an exciting time when we're looking at the future, when we're looking towards the future.

We're going to work as hard as we can, and I know we have the staff here, everyone here in Flowery Branch is really putting in the work right now.

ARTHUR SMITH: Just to echo what Terry just said right there, obviously I want to take a second here just to reiterate what we put out in our statement about Matt Ryan. Matt Ryan has been the consummate professional here. He means a lot to this franchise. He had 14 great years, and I'm very thankful for the year I got to spend with Matt.

We obviously made this decision in the best interest of the franchise going forward, and we feel really good, and as Matt probably reiterated yesterday, it was very amicable, and we feel like it was a win for both sides, for us in the long-term and Matt right now.

We had some staff changes that we're very excited about. Terry just hit on the free agent moves that we're also really excited about. We also understand there's going to be some questions about our quarterback process, and we respect that. We explored it, the options, and we understand the seriousness of the situations and the concerns from our fan base.

With that, we'll open up to questions to answer to the best of our ability.

Q. When it comes to the pursuit of Deshaun Watson, how much did you look into the '22 civil claims or civil

cases that are currently pending against him?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, we had a process, and we looked into everything, and we determined from where we are and the information we had, we determined we wanted to explore it. Obviously we take the allegations very serious, but based off the information we had, we wanted to explore it.

Q. Following up on that, in what you were looking into with that, did you reach out to Tony Buzbee? Did you speak to any of the women? Did you read the complaints? If not, why not?

ARTHUR SMITH: We're not going to get into our process. We would in any potential trade, any player -- we understand the seriousness of the questions you're asking, but we're also not going to comment on an ongoing civil case.

Q. Terry, at what point did you decide or were you informed that y'all were going to be part of the Deshaun Watson trade discussions?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, it was a collective decision. We had ongoing discussions about it, and we made a collective decision to, again, explore it. Throughout that process, we were very transparent the entire time. Again, Arthur was -- talked to Matt on a regular basis, because we wanted to make sure that he was informed and he was aware, and so we wanted to handle that part the right way.

We together discussed it, and we made a collective decision to explore it.

Q. Arthur, when you had that first conversation with Matt about the situation, did you feel like at that time that that was going to be the end of the Falcons' and Matt's relationship regardless of how things worked out?

ARTHUR SMITH: I had several conversations. Obviously there's been a lot of transition here from when Terry and I got here. Matt has understood that ultimately there was going to be a succession plan for us and where we're at with this franchise and where he's at in his career, so those conversations were when we got here. And it's been the same thing at the end of the season. It's the same reason when I got up there in Indianapolis, I said what I said, because you just never know. You understand that circumstances change, things happen. Sometimes they're in your control, out of your control, and we've always evaluated this as a possible answer to a long-term plan. It wasn't like it came out of the blue.

Certainly those aren't easy conversations, but there's only one way we know how to do business with our players, and that's direct and being honest and transparent, and so that's what the conversation I had with Matt started off.

Obviously every day the situation changed, and I kept him up to date. We met twice in person. So he was aware every day. Doesn't mean people can feel one way or the other, but we were very transparent.

Q. Did you feel like the Watson situation was going to trigger -- you were going to trigger the succession plan right then regardless whether you ended up with Deshaun Watson or not?

ARTHUR SMITH: Any players, when you have trade discussions, in today's society -- we're not working at the NSA. You understand when you start having any kind of trade discussions they're going to get out. So you have to have contingency plans.

From last year to this year, Terry and I and our staff are constantly talking through those things. You know it's a possibility when you, quote-unquote, cross the rubicon and you're having serious trade talks and exploring that it gets out. How serious we were or not doesn't matter. You have to have a plan. Again, the player may have a say and especially somebody like Matt Ryan, so we had a plan, and that's why we executed the way we did.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, and whether we began to explore Deshaun or not, we were discussing trading Matt. We were discussing that just looking at all the options and what was best for this team. That was already -- we were already having those discussions.

Q. This off-season, to make that trade this off-season?

TERRY FONTENOT: We were discussing it, yes, sir.

Q. You touched on parts of this, but how was this decision arrived to trade Matt Ryan just systematically?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, when we look at where we are right now as a team, we were going to have to -- we couldn't have kept Matt Ryan the way the current contract was. In order to field a team, we were going to have to -- we didn't want to do anything with Matt Ryan's contract last year, but we were handcuffed. We had to in order to field a football team, and it would have been the same thing this year. So we had to do that.

When we looked at doing that and the impact that has on us next year, then we're continuing to do the same thing,

and then now we're in another situation next year where it's hard to sign and re-sign players.

We hate losing our players. We hate it. We hate losing players. We hate not being able to sign players, and again, our pro department pounded the pavement and we found some good players at good value and we're excited about that and that's our job and we're not making excuses about it, but when we think about the future and, okay, do we want to be in this situation again next year or do we want to look at it and say, okay, let's really -- looking at the draft capital we have and the cap space that we now have, and I know you guys know the impact that it has trading Matt now and how significant it is.

We discussed that; it wasn't a foregone conclusion. We discussed everything. We discussed what we would do with his contract if we kept him here, and we had all those discussions because it's hard; it's hard to trade a player of his caliber and the type of person he is. It's very difficult to do, but we had all those discussions, and we decided this was the right time to do it.

Q. Please explain the benefits of the compensation that you all received and how you plan to proceed with the record dead salary cap hit that you're going to take this year. Talk about the benefits of the compensation, the third-round pick, and I guess at some point the dead salary cap hit had to play in it also.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, we're taking it on the chin this year, but taking it on the chin this year and now you look at where we are next year, it's significant. If not, if we don't do that, and again, we could have restructured his contract or done something with his contract and kept him this year and then we'd have still had -- if we traded him after the season or if we keep him next year, then we're still in a really tough salary cap situation.

With this, we take it on the chin this year, and it's our job to find value in free agency and to draft well and to put a good football team on the field this year even with that dead cap. It's an obstacle but we look at it as an opportunity, and that's our job. We're not making excuses about it.

But us deciding to take it on the chin right now will really -- it makes a significant difference for us next year in the future.

Q. Terry, many from the outside looking in did not understand why Matt was traded with a third-round pick as that compensation when a quarterback of his caliber is known in the past few years to draw more. Would you mind going into more detail as to why that trade was something that y'all were willing to execute

with that compensation?

TERRY FONTENOT: Right. Well, what I would say is more important for us to do right by Matt than to try to maximize compensation, and when we look at it, yes, we probably could have opened it up and talked to every team and traded Matt somewhere that he did not want to be and gotten more compensation. Yes, there's probably -- we could have had a drawn-out process and shopped him and gone through this and traded him somewhere he didn't want to be, but we talked about it and we said, if we're going to go down this road, we want to do right by Matt. He has to be involved in it, and we have to allow -- and when you do that, when we allow him to talk to the team and Arthur is talking to him about a team he wants to go to and we opened that up. We let him talk to -- we opened up a window and allowed him to talk to their head coach and GM, and when you do that, yes, you're not going to have very much leverage, just being completely honest, because we're allowing him to be a part of that process.

But we discussed that and we said yes, the compensation isn't going to be as much if we go this route, but we thought it was more important to handle it that way with Matt. He's just done too much for this organization, for us and for everything, we wanted to make sure we handled it the right way. The way he treated us and the way he handled everything, it was more important for us to make sure we did right by Matt as opposed to just doing our best to maximize compensation.

ARTHUR SMITH: Also, too, you've got to look at '23 and the fit, where we're at, and not every team is in a market for a veteran quarterback and understanding where Matt was with his contract, where he fit, where we're at or where Indianapolis is at. For us it was a win-win because it opens up a lot of space in '23 so we don't have to keep playing this game of restructure, minimum deals, so that was part of the thought, as well. That's part of the compensation, as well, is what it opens up in the future for us.

Q. Arthur, kind of looking ahead and also looking back, can you kind of speak to your history with Marcus and what that time was with him and what you learned about him when you both were at Tennessee together?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, so obviously Marcus and I were together the entire time I was in Tennessee. There were a few different scheme changes, staff changes. Obviously I was a coordinator the last year when Marcus was there, and a lot of lessons learned. Marcus had some terrific runs with us in Tennessee. He obviously was a starter who won a playoff game with us in the 2017 season.

He's at a different point of his career from where he was at then. I'm at a different point in my career. A lot of lessons learned and we're excited to work together again. He's an exciting player, a smart football player, and he's excited about the opportunity to get to Atlanta to prove himself.

Q. I was just wondering, was there a point during last season that you felt like you were going to need to trade Matt Ryan or was it all in the off-season that that came about? Also when you keep talking about the future, what does that future look like? Are you talking about a couple years, next season? I think there's a lot of uncertainty when it comes to is this a rebuild year for the Falcons?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think the rebuild tag, it's a competitive league. We understand our charge is to win. We thought we were going to win last year. We come in year one, it's a completely different culture, a lot of obstacles we had to work through, and we feel like we made pretty good progress. But where we're at, our charge is to win a championship.

That's where certain players are at different points of their career, and we don't want to be stuck in this limbo. So yeah, you do have to make some moves sometimes, and you're going to take it -- like Terry said, you take it on the chin a little bit with dead money. That's why I don't like the rebuild. This is a competitive league. Our charge as a coach, we're going to go out there and compete and play better team football than we played last year and improve.

There's a lot of things also as we're going to compete now and building for the future. Just the opportunity to open up where it gives you some more cap room. We like where we're at with our draft picks and the number of picks we have.

You don't need 15 picks in a draft, either. Not all those guys are going to make your team. I feel good where we're at, but our charge is not to be stuck in this limbo area. We are going to build this the right way, and we're going to be competitive this year. That's our charge, as a team, as a coach. Nobody is saying rebuild.

I understand the question. Just understand the reality, that we're trying -- you have to do both. We're going to put a competitive team. We like our young players we need to develop. We like our free agency signings, and our charge is we've got to do well. We'll continue to add guys. We need to have a good draft, and understand we'll open up a lot of space so we are players in free agency and can sign our own.

That's a big part of free agency. We got to a price point



with a couple guys where we financially just couldn't do it.

Q. Was there ever a point that you actually thought the Deshaun Watson deal was done, where he was coming? And then at what point did you guys either have an opportunity to match or was there a walk-away before that ever happened?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, I would say there wasn't. We just went through the process. Basically what they do is they give us a window. We had to talk to the Texans on the front end and they gave us a window to have a meeting with him, and we were able to have that meeting, and outside of that we weren't able to communicate about Deshaun. Once you have that meeting, then you step away.

Again, look, we were exploring this, so that meeting was a part of the process. If we would have taken that next step, we're continuing to explore.

So no, I think there was never a time where we felt he was -- that we were going to have that player here. Again, we were just exploring it.

Very aware of everything involved in it and making sure we have sensitivity to that. But we were exploring it.

Q. So you were never given an opportunity by his agent to say, match this and he comes, do this and he comes?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, we're not going to get into all the details of that part of it, but like I said, we were allowed a window to have a meeting with the player, and from there we just had to wait from their end.

Q. This is for Mr. Fontenot. Coach Smith just said that you're not going to use the word -- you're not going to say "rebuild" going into this year. Why can you not say that word? In this town we've seen the Braves rebuild and we've seen the Hawks rebuild. Is there something about the NFL that just makes you unwilling to just use that word? I realize it's often an excuse for fans not to buy tickets, but is that it?

ARTHUR SMITH: I don't want to cut Terry off here, but the way you're looking at it, our charge is to win. We're coaches -- it's not fair to the players. You guys are going to put that on there -- I don't know what coach is going to coach a team and say, hey, guys, we're rebuilding. I understand where we're at; we're in a transition. And there is certain elements you are, you're constantly rebuilding in the NFL. Your roster changes year to year so much.

It's more of a team philosophy and the players that we have here that compete every day and the coaches. So I understand what you're talking about big picture, and I'm not dismissing that. I'm just talking about your charge when you're in the National Football League, our objective is to win football games. We understand there's other things going on around it and long-term strategy.

Sorry to cut you off, Terry, but I wanted to clarify what I was talking about.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, I'm with you, Art, and we definitely understand the question and it's a good point, and yet the reason we hate the word "rebuild" is because when we're talking to Casey Hayward and he's excited about coming home and competing right now. He's a real talented player that has done some really good things in this league. He's not coming somewhere to lose and he's not -- again, Lorenzo, guys outside the building. When Younghoe extends or when Jake extends, these guys are excited about going out there and competing, and yes, it's a challenge with all the dead money this year. It's a challenge, but taking it all on this year -- we're excited about what we're going to do this year because we're going to do the best we can and we're going to go out and compete, and then next year it's significant when you look at where we are.

Again, I know you guys have all looked at it and the significant impact this will make on us next year, but we would never say that because it's just not fair. It's not fair to the players here. We've got 17 games next year, and we're going to go out and compete in every single one of them.

We definitely understand what you're saying and the points you're making, but that's why rebuild is not something that we ever want to say.

Q. It feels like it was four years ago with Calvin Ridley at this point with everything that's gone on, but what is Calvin Ridley -- if he is ever brought back from his suspension, what is his future with the Falcons? Could he return to Atlanta or is that no longer an option in your eyes after his suspension?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, obviously we were very transparent with everything throughout the season with the way everything played out. We did our best to be supportive of him and his family, and then we get into the off-season, and it was a surprise to all of us when we on February 9th got the call from the league and told us that there was an investigation.

We were talking to other teams and having some

discussions, and yet we got that call and had to take a step back.

Right now with Calvin, we continue to -- right now he's on our roster, and we continue to support in whatever way we can and do the best that we can, and how the future looks, we just don't know. It's a long time from now, so we'll see what happens with that, but we've been transparent. Really all the information on Calvin that -- we've been transparent with everything with him, and we'll see where that goes.

Q. Terry, two points of quick fact checks. Did Matt have a no-trade ability in this process?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, he doesn't. He doesn't. But again, it's --

Q. I know you wanted to do right by him, but I had seen reported that he had the ability to veto.

TERRY FONTENOT: No, he doesn't have a no-trade clause.

Q. Secondly, just to make sure I'm clear on this point, when Deshaun Watson went to Cleveland, did you at that point want to keep Matt or at that point the decision had already been made by you or Matt that you were going to have to do something else?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, it was still a discussion, and at that point we talked about it and we told him we were going to allow him to talk to the team and we'd go from there.

We were looking at all the different possibilities and all the different scenarios, but again, different with Matt than with some players. He was involved in the discussion because it was important for us to make him a part of it.

Q. Then on a different track, how does what's happened in the last week affect the likelihood that you're going to take a quarterback in this coming draft? Does it increase in your mind the urgency to do that now, or do you still think this is a longer term process?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, no, it doesn't -- it depends. If we feel great about a quarterback at whatever pick, then we're going to take a quarterback, and if we don't, we're not going to reach and do something that we're not excited about.

Obviously we're very excited that we took Kyle Pitts at 4 and he's going to be significant for this organization, this franchise for a long time, so we're going to make a decision

at each pick and we're never going to feel pressured to reach for a quarterback.

Now, we're going to add to the position. Whether it's in the draft, we'll see where that is. It could be in the draft. It could also be in free agency, and it could also be via trade. We're going to add to the position, and obviously we were -- Monday we were at Pitt, we were at Liberty yesterday. We'll be in Oxford today, and we'll be at Cincinnati Thursday, and so clearly we're going to see all these quarterbacks. It's an exciting class. They're different flavors. We're going to dig into this class, but we're not going to feel pressured to do anything; we're going to do what's right for this team and take the best players off the board.

But we are going to add to that position, whether it's in the draft or with another avenue.

Q. Arthur, we talk a lot about quarterback fit with the head coach and the guy who's actually calling the offense. Is that still a thing with you're going to go to these four schools, or is it just about the talent of the player and sort of it's not square-peg-round-hole anymore, it's just finding the most talented player, and then doing what he can do best as opposed to the other way around?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's part of coaching. I don't have that fixed mindset. It's just got to be the right guy and the way you want to build this team. Obviously you can study the last 40 years of team building and when you've added quarterbacks and when you haven't. We feel like we need to make sure whoever the guy is that there's enough around him to be successful.

So you're weighing every cost. You go into last year's draft in terms of team building, and we decided because Kyle Pitts we thought was the best long-term fit for us that we'd continue. It'll be the same thing this year.

The original question, I don't have that -- there's a lot of things that need to fit, but we'll adapt to player strengths. That's always in my charge. That's what we tried to do last year with Cordarrelle Patterson, and we're really excited he's back. Same thing we've done throughout my coaching career. It's not, hey, this is my system and this guy must fit my system. I've never thought that way.

Q. Terry, how far ahead does a general manager -- people already start to talk about next year's quarterbacks in college. Is that even a thing as well anymore, or can you afford to play that game?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, that's a great question, and we

do have to look at that, and we have to look at -- again, you don't want to feel pressured to do something, but you have to look, not just for myself, but it's funny when you're watching tape on players, you always -- me and Arthur were talking about some underclassmen the other day because when you're watching tape on other players you see those guys, and that's important to not just look at this year but to look at next year and think big picture. So that's a great question, and we do as a GM and as a head coach, we definitely look into the future and what's coming in the next draft classes.

ARTHUR SMITH: We have a great scouting staff, too. That's their charge. By the time we're having conversations here on the '22 draft, a lot of our scouts, they've been studying these guys for years. You're not necessarily talking about write reports, but unless you've got your head in the sand, they're constantly -- they know what's going on in the college game.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, yeah, great point, and like you say, we have a great staff. They know players and you really have to once they're in their freshman year, because that player, you're going to be talking about him in a couple seasons. So they know who's there, and they know those teams top to bottom, and they bring up those players to us.

Yeah, it's a great question, and because of the staff we have, we're always aware of not just this year but next year.

Q. Is it one of the reasons you accumulate draft capital in case you do like somebody and have to make a move up the following season?

ARTHUR SMITH: Certainly take it into consideration. We certainly want to have picks that allows you to be flexible depending on the situation at hand. Where we're at right now, the other narrative about, oh, play the comp game, well, we've got to fill out a roster, so a lot of these guys we've added like Lorenzo Carter who's going to be a good -- where he's at age wise and career as we keep building this. There's some strategy there. We have to field a team. And I understand that question about the comp game, as well, but we feel good about where we're at. We feel good about the opportunities in front of us, too.

Q. Arthur, when it comes to Marcus, when you were working with him, he did get benched for Ryan Tannehill. Why do you feel like this time it might be different in terms of how things go with Marcus and how he plays?

ARTHUR SMITH: There's been a lot of growth from him and myself. Ironically they're completely different players,

but Ryan Tannehill was in this situation when we got Ryan.

So Marcus is a high-end talent just like Ryan was. He was a first-round pick. He's in a different spot in his career, and I trust Marcus, and Marcus, he's going to come in here and he's going to give us everything he's got. He's got a high-end talent and he understands what's happened in the past. He's learned from them, I've learned from them, and we feel excited about the opportunity.

Q. Going back to the Deshaun stuff again because you guys have both said "exploring" a couple of times. If Deshaun Watson had said yes, I want to come to Atlanta, would that have then happened or would then you have had to do more research and more digging?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's a good question --

Q. And one other follow-up on that, as well, is you've talked about Matt Ryan's contract hamstringing you; how would Deshaun Watson's contract theoretically not have hamstrung you where Matt Ryan's did?

ARTHUR SMITH: A little bit of a hypothetical now. We're focusing -- I understand and respect the question, but you're talking about hypotheticals here. It's a completely different situation.

Like I said, we did explore it, but now you're talking about things that happen in other spots that wouldn't have been the same. We're not going to get into those hypotheticals. We can go down that road, and I understand why you're asking and doing your job, but we're just not going to get into hypotheticals.

TERRY FONTENOT: And really it was -- when we say "explore," okay, we're going to take this next step in exploration, so this is the step. And there was such a layered process, so now all of a sudden like he's saying, if he would have chose us, okay, so now we negotiate with the Texans and we do more exploring. It's a great question because it was a process, and we were willing to go through the process of exploring it, but there were so many layers to it. It wasn't just as simple as him saying, that's where I want to play. There were still so many layers to it.

Like Arthur says, yes, it was still going to be a big contract. Not the same contract if we were taking on -- as we'd take on his current contract, but we're talking about a 26-year-old player and we're thinking long term with even pursuing him, but again, it was exploration and there were so many layers that we were going to have to get through.

Q. I've got to imagine when you're filling out the practice squad, the owner is not involved, but how



much was Arthur Blank involved with the starting quarterback stuff, whether it's pursuing Deshaun or trading Matt, and is he coming in as a leader or are you just calling him at the end of the day saying here's what we did?

ARTHUR SMITH: Another thing, too, we have a very collaborative organization. I know everybody wants that story, whether it was this person's idea or this person's charge. We have so many conversations about multiple things, and Mr. Blank is phenomenal to work for, and anybody that's ever worked for him understands that there's constantly, as we communicate throughout the entire season, questions. He's terrific to work for in that regard.

But I know the story everybody wants is that -- we have a very collaborative team, from the personnel, the coaching, conversations that Terry and I have with Rich McKay at times, so this is a collaborative effort here, and that's probably the best way to put it for you.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, he's so supportive, and he's so passionate, and he wants to win in the worst way, and yet he always empowers us.

So we have discussions about everything, and he cares about everything. It's normal to get a text at 11:00 at night when we start talking about something, but it always comes from a place of support.

So we discuss things, but he always says, you guys are going to make the decisions, and he's great about it. We were having dinner the other night, and I felt bad because my family was in Orlando and they were at Disney, and I felt bad because I felt like I haven't seen my kids in a few weeks, and we all are -- I'm not making excuses; everybody works hard. But I was going to meet my family in Orlando and I couldn't, and so he said -- he felt so bad, he wanted me to go, and he said, well, okay, I'll make sure I send your family to Orlando down the road.

But that's the kind of person he is. He really cares about us. He gives us all the support that we need. He is passionate, and he's in every discussion, but it's from a place of support as opposed to a place of mandating anything like that. It's just -- he's just very supportive. We couldn't be more appreciative of Arthur.

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