

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Terry Fontenot

Arthur Smith

Draft Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: Appreciate you all being here. It's good to see everybody in person outside of virtual. I know usually we have a few technical difficulties when we go virtual, so it's good to see you guys in person. Hope everybody is doing well.

We want to start out by acknowledging and thanking some people in the building as we prepare for this process. We started out the off-season and we had a goal to add competition to the roster, to add quality men and players into the building, and we believe our pro staff working along with the coaches and football administration have done a really good job working to do that.

We're obviously not finished. The roster building process is 24/7, 365, so we're continuing to work through that. We'll turn over every stone, yet we appreciate the work that's gone into it up to this point.

As Thursday approaches, there's a lot of people that have worked hard to get us prepared for the draft. We feel very confident, excited and prepared, and we're excited about what we're going to be able to do day one, two and three and that's because a lot of people have had their hands in it starting with the college scouting department, who they've grinded through this process for a long time; the coaches, as soon as the season ends they turn into scouts.

We have a very inclusive process, so they're very involved. They're on the road, they're writing up a lot of players and they do a lot of work, and also opening their door to scouts and spending time with scouts so we can have a cohesive staff, so we appreciate the coaches.

IT, analytics, the video department, the training room, the doctors, a lot of people have put their -- have put a lot of work into this. I would say we're very thankful and excited as we approach the draft.

ARTHUR SMITH: Just to follow up on what Terry spoke

about, obviously very thankful we have a very collaborative staff. They've done a tremendous job. We're excited to be a couple days away from the draft. We feel like we've had a really productive spring.

With that, we'll open it up to questions.

Q. How has this been different for you guys this year than the last few years?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, I would say one of the main differences is not being under the COVID restrictions that we had last year. All the different exposures that we get with the players, having unlimited access at the pro days, being able to go out and do personal workouts, being able to bring players in for the 30 visits, being able to be in person at the combine, being able to -- look, the local pro day is something we didn't have last year and there's obviously a lot of home-grown talent here that we were able to see, so that was exciting.

I would say one of the big parts is just not having all those restrictions that we had last year. And the other part is, hey, we have been together, this entire staff, for over a calendar year, so the cohesiveness and building those relationships, that's important.

Us being together, living together really helps in the process, as well.

Q. Broadly, what do you feel like you need to see in order to draft a quarterback in this class? What do you feel like you need to see from these guys?

TERRY FONTENOT: I don't think it's as simple as -- look, we evaluate. We spent a lot of time with this quarterback draft class this year. We spent a lot of time with the draft class last year, did a lot of work. Obviously we're not going to give away what we're going to do at 8 or any other pick, but we could come out of this draft with a quarterback. We want to add to that room and we'll see what happens. But we do a lot of work on this class, we did a lot of work on this class just like we did last year.

Q. Chris Lindstrom and Kaleb McGary, have you guys



made a decision on those guys yet?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, we have until next week, and so we're working through that. But we'll communicate directly with the players and their agents once we make those decisions and we'll just keep that internal and private for right now.

Q. What makes drafting a quarterback so hard? I went back and looked at the drafts from '88 on up; drafting a quarterback, a lot of smart people have been trying to do it, but what are some things from the composite of all the people you mentioned, what is that like trying to get that quarterback if you decide to go that way?

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure, there's a lot of variables that happen, why guys are successful, why they're not. A lot of it's fit, when you're taking a player, especially taking a quarterback, really any portion of the draft, to make sure you have a plan.

I'm surprised you only went to '88. I thought you'd go earlier. There's some pretty good early '80s classes, as well. I'm a little surprised you didn't go back that far.

Q. There was nobody in the '80s in the building that I know of.

ARTHUR SMITH: Could be. Jimmy Hay.

Q. Then to follow that up, what makes it so hard, the history, does that help you all when you have those discussions that you have a deep well of comparisons and so forth, comps on quarterbacks from different periods?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah.

ARTHUR SMITH: It certainly helps. You look at why certain players were successful, why they weren't, what you could possibly control. Yeah, I don't think you ever dismiss a class year after year. I think you need to understand quarterback talent is coming into the league. If you don't take one, who you potentially would have to see, you'd have to face off against. A lot goes into it, but you certainly study history and why guys are successful, why guys aren't.

Q. Arthur, when you're evaluating a guy, do you find that your mind drifts more toward what's his floor or what's his ceiling?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think sometimes probably more the floor. I think anything else you get, you're certainly trying to enhance and develop, but that's certainly where

mine goes. That doesn't say it's right or wrong, but that's just how my mind operates.

Q. How does that impact how you grade -- that's probably the wrong word, but place players in this pecking order from your perspective?

ARTHUR SMITH: That depends what you're looking for at the certain position. What's your job description, what's your vision for the player, how do you think he fits. You've got to evaluate all that so when you put a pick in you've got a plan for the guy and you can follow through with it, like here's what I know he can do, here's what you're trying to enhance.

Certainly there's all kind of different skill players. There's a lot of guys that have different abilities that can be successful, and depends what you're looking for and who's available when you pick, and when you take that player, do you have the vision, are you going to try to enhance that and play him in the right spot. Certainly you look at all that stuff.

Q. Is that answer any different for you from your seat? Are you a ceiling or a floor guy at your heart?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, it's the same, and I would say usually we want to bring in players that have a high floor because we're focusing on the makeup and bringing in the right human beings. So usually if you have players that have the right makeup, they're wired the right way and they're going to work and they're going to get obviously the coaching here and they're going to get all the resources here, so they're going to have that high floor because of their makeup and because of their intangibles, and yet obviously we want players with high ceilings, but you'd rather it like this, you don't want it to be like this. I think when we focus on the makeup, then we usually get players that will have high floors.

Q. How have the free agency signings that y'all have had over the last couple months changed the way that maybe you look at some of the position groups of need as you go into the draft?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, it definitely helps. That's the first part of the process in the off-season, and we want to bring in as much as you can in every phase at every position, and when you add, we always want to take the best players off the board in the draft, but when you're adding to those positions you're adding competition, I think that helps going into the draft. So that's really important. That's something we prioritize. So yeah, that helps a lot.

Q. Obviously going back to Mike's question right off

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

the top, getting guys to be able to be in the building and having those visits, what do you gain from that part of the process that you didn't have last year and kind of what are you looking for in that point of the process?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, last year everyone was playing under the same rules, so we had to -- and we got everything accomplished that we needed to, but I think it is different when you actually get people in the building and you're getting -- you're able to be around them a lot more as opposed to being on a Zoom.

I think there is a difference being in person and spending more time with them.

I don't know if I could put one specific thing on it and why it's important. I think being in person and getting that time up close, I think that's valuable.

Q. The widespread perception is there's more uncertainty from folks trying to project the first few picks in the draft. Would you agree with that, and if you do, how does that impact your maneuvering and you're trying to get a draft pick on your board and what you expect to see?

TERRY FONTENOT: I agree. I agree. When is the last time we sat here and everyone doesn't know who the first and second pick are. It's unique. Especially last year we were sitting here, we were like the first pick of the draft last year because especially once San Francisco traded up we basically knew the first three players that were going to come off the board.

Now this year that's not the case and we're sitting at 8, so we try our best to anticipate what's going to go in front of us, but we have to be prepared for a lot of different variables and a lot of different scenarios, whether we have to stack the players and be prepared to take them off how we see them, but we also have to be prepared to have those conversations about moving up, about moving down.

I would say yes, there's so many more variables, but we just have to be prepared for every scenario.

Q. If I could follow up on that, as part of that difficulty and figuring out what's going to happen, how does that affect any preliminary talks you may have to keep doors open on what calls you may want to receive from folks who might be interested in talking to you about a possible trade?

TERRY FONTENOT: I would say we still go through the same process. We're always going to talk to the teams

ahead of us and the teams behind us and we're going to talk to the other 31 teams and communicate. So we're going to have those conversations anyway, regardless.

In the same way we're going to stack the board. So I think it doesn't affect your process. We just have to make sure we're intentional and we know exactly -- we go through every single scenario to determine what we're going to do.

Q. How did the first year of the rebuild go in your view? I don't mean in terms of wins and losses, I mean as you look back, decisions you made in the draft, how did players develop, did the guys turn out to be who you thought they were going to be?

TERRY FONTENOT: So what he wants me to do is repeat his question and -- savvy, right? I've got to watch him, too. It's not just D-Led.

Q. You two just go back and forth --

ARTHUR SMITH: No, I'm not going to give you that satisfaction.

TERRY FONTENOT: Look, I'll say this: We're always -- we're trying to add competition at every position constantly, and trying to bring in players that are going to compete. This is week 2 of the off-season program and obviously players choose if they want to come or not and that's their prerogative.

But I'll say we have a lot of guys out there competing and working to get better, and we appreciate that. We're excited about that. We saw improvement in areas throughout the year. We'll see improvement throughout this off-season. We're going to keep bringing in competition.

That's our charge. That's our goal at every single position, to bring in competition and continue to improve.

Q. I guess I should ask you if you would change anything.

TERRY FONTENOT: We're always looking -- we always have a -- we always have an after-action report. We're always going to with a critical eye look at everything we do, whether we're talking about last year's draft or the way we approach every single decision, every single transaction we make we're going to look at it with a critical eye and we're going to always evolve and improve the process. We're focusing more on the process as opposed to focusing on exactly what the result is. We're looking at the process and we're going to always constantly improve and evolve in every single area.

Yes, we looked back at last year. We're going to look at the detail of everything we did, every decision we made and look at ways that we could have improved. I think that's where you have to have humility in these roles, and we both have that and we both do that.

Q. You sort of just answered that question a little bit, but for both of you or either one of you, what would you say to fans or media who question whether things were done well enough or whether enough progress has been made?

ARTHUR SMITH: You're talking about after year one in a draft class? The story is already written on some of the players; is that what you're asking? We've got a long way to go. We've got a lot of guys that are going to take on bigger roles. I think you'd fool to look back in history after one year and say, yeah, I know exactly what this guy's career is going to look like. We've got a lot of guys that feel good about that played different roles, whose roles will expand this year, and that's part of our job as coaches to develop them. We still feel pretty good.

I think -- I don't know if there's specific player or position you're talking about.

Q. No, no.

ARTHUR SMITH: You're talking about a general catch-all? Yeah, I think you continue to evaluate, develop.

I think over time if you've made a mistake, you've got to be realistic about it if you need to move on. But we feel pretty good about where our guys are at. A lot of guys that were drafted last year, they're expected to have bigger roles for us this year.

Q. When you evaluate this draft class, some teams do it different, but do you have like a tier A or a number of prospects that you say, hey, there's four, five, six, however many there is, and how does that impact you guys at 8 when you see that number?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, good question. We'll evaluate the class. We have certain categories that would put players historically in the first round. We're not going to grade on the curve, so we're not going to have 32 first-round picks every year. We might have 20 first-round picks, 18 first-round picks.

When you're making those decisions, do you look at, okay, this is an impact -- we can get an impact player up to this point. So if we discussed a trade-back, then we don't want to go below this area or you're weighing out the pros and

the cons of it.

We evaluate the players, put them in certain categories, and that's how we can make decisions to know where you can still get impact players or what area you are in the draft.

Q. Learning your evaluation process, there's a lot of talk about this quarterback class maybe not being as high. How do you compare maybe the next quarterback class when you guys do your evaluations of this one when you decide whether to pull the trigger?

TERRY FONTENOT: We're going to live in the moment right now. Obviously we know we have such a good scouting department, so they know players that are in high school that are already coming out and they know the freshmen and sophomores and so when we're watching crossover tape you see the players and you know what's coming up next.

That being said, I think you always have to live in the moment and do what's best for your team. We're thinking big picture. But we're not going to say, hey, we might get this player next year so we don't want to get this player this year because there's so much that comes between, and you think about the time, and it's funny when you'll see a mock draft right after this draft for next year. Take one of those and then put it up next to the real draft, and it's comical.

Again, we have an excellent scouting staff that makes us aware of everything that's coming in the future, but we've got to live in the moment and do what's best for our team right now.

Q. The edge class, what stands out to you about this class and some of the players that could be available to you?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, without giving anything away, it's a good class. I think throughout -- there are players at the top at that elite level, there are players throughout the draft and even down at the bottom. That's such a unique position in that it doesn't have to be one flavor. If you're a pressure player, it can come different ways. But I would say it's a strong class.

Q. In a perfect world, when is your draft board set, and before the draft starts, do you know who you're going for at No. 8?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, well, it's kind of like the question posed earlier that at 8, right now, where last year

at this time as we were sitting here, we had a pretty good feeling about -- we knew who we were drafting unless obviously something were to happen trade-wise.

But now it's completely different. We have our board set, but to know who's going to be there at 8 or if we're going to stay at 8, move up or move down, there are so many variables. I would say right now our board is set, but the hay is never in the barn.

We're continuing to work through things. All the way up until and throughout the draft, we're constantly working on it, so our board is set. We've got the players up where we have them stacked, but we're always gathering information and always working through it.

Q. For Mr. Fontenot, do you believe there's an NFL starting quarterback in this class?

TERRY FONTENOT: I think there are starters at every single position, and that's a great question in the way you proposed it. I love it. It's some savvy. Like he's experienced, right?

But there's starters at every position. To look at -- right now we evaluate the players, and of course there's going to be starters that come out of this class. We won't know that until three or four years from now with some of the players, but at every position there's starters, there's backups at every position. There's some guys that aren't going to make it at every position.

Q. Will you be disappointment if you don't come out of this draft with a quarterback?

TERRY FONTENOT: No. We could draft a quarterback in any of the rounds, or there's multiple ways to acquire a quarterback. We want to add to our room and we will, so it could be in the draft, it could be after the draft, it could be via trade. We're not going to limit ourselves to any possibility. We're going to turn over every stone, so whether it's in the draft or not, we'll add to that room.

Q. Arthur, I wanted to ask you about something we ask about all the time, the best-player-available philosophy. Where do you stand on that, and is there any push and pull between the guy at the very top of the board and somebody else who might be at a position of what you guys view as a more immediate need?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think when you get yourself in trouble -- if things are even, I think your tendency is to go, if you want to say, need but the way -- you've got to trust the process and the way your board sits. If it's even, yeah,

there's certainly a tendency to go more of a need, but you don't want to sit there -- and you've got to trust your evaluation process, your scouts and everything. You've got all this work put in, and just because of the pressure of the clock just to over-draft somebody and bring them up, I think you get yourself in trouble. So that's why I think you get best player available. That's always exceptions. But you try to stay consistent in that regard.

Q. Terry, you've talked multiple times about adding to the quarterback room and that you guys are interested in doing that, whether it be through the draft or free agency, whatever it may be. What other parts of the team or what other rooms do you feel like you need to add to?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, there's not one room that we don't want to add to, and so that's why we have needs in every area of the roster and even places we might feel better about. We're thinking big picture, so there could be players that won't be under contract in a couple years or something. There's not one position that we don't need to add competition to, which makes this process very easy for us because we can -- we want to add quality players and human beings into this team and into this locker room and so we're going to be able to do that.

So I wouldn't say there's one position where we'd say, hey, we're all set, we don't need to add a player there.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I don't think you're ever all set. Even if you were to win a Super Bowl, I think you're just going to continue to come back is not a great strategy. I think the more we can continue to add at every position, increase the competition, improve the roster, that's what we'll do. You saw how many transactions we made last year. It's no different.

I think what you're seeing now, there's a lot more avenues and people are more willing to make those trades or however the process goes, but I think that's what you're seeing around the league, as well.

Q. Arthur, I know you're up front, being an offensive coordinator, got all these meetings leading up to the draft to discuss players. How do you prioritize that offensive minded versus --

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, I think you do what's best for the team, and if you can consider that, I think you'll be in good shape. I'm the head coach first, and I think that and -- I spent a couple years on defense, sat in on special teams.

You understand that you need to improve your team in all three phases. You can look at it, and sure, we've got

needs everywhere. You're going to have needs everywhere every year. You want to continue to improve and enhance and evolve.

I feel good about where we're at, where our process is at right now, and we're excited about this draft coming up.

Q. Terry, do y'all have an internal metric for what constitutes a good pick? A first-round pick should give us 50 career starts, and a second-round pick should be a guy on the roster in three years, anything like that?

TERRY FONTENOT: So when we talk about the players, the categories that puts a player in the first round, it's going to be an impact player, right, so he's going to be a major impact, and as we go through the draft, okay, there's the solid starters and contributors and developmental, so there are categories in each area.

Now, what is an impact player? We don't have -- it's not like we have a certain, he has to --

Q. No number associated with that?

TERRY FONTENOT: Right, these statistics. We evaluate the players, and so as you grade the draft classes three years down the road, then you evaluate the players regardless of their statistics or their specific play time, you'll just evaluate the players and what they were, but as we set the board, if you fit in this impact category, you fit in the first round. Like I said, we're never going to grade on the curve.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, it's an impact, having an impact on winning, what the role is. You have to envision just using games-played metric, yeah, if you over-draft somebody, I've seen this happen before. You say, oh, great, he was a second-round pick, he started 50 games, but he also went through three position coaches before we realized the guy couldn't play. So I've seen that, too. It's hard. That's what makes this sport hard. There's so many variables you can make an argument for or against at the end of the day that have an impact and help this team win.

Q. Arthur, when it comes to making the pick, whatever the pick may be down the road, this year or next, and you're looking at the quarterback position, is your influence or input, whatever the word is, any different with that position than other positions?

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure. That's the one thing -- most important position, collaborative. Yeah, you're going to be judged on the decisions we make, yeah.

But if you sit there and there's 30 people saying no and you're the only one saying yes, yes, I think it's good to have conviction, but Friday night, Saturday, off-season, when you trade, 23, obviously you hope to have a long career here. But it won't just be like, hey, this is my guy, like I picked him.

That always makes me laugh a little bit, too, is that you draft a player and you say, I found him. Well, what the about the thousands of guys, the scouts he went through. You didn't mention that list, that you're talking about collaborative, there are a lot of people that go into it, from the training staff to the weight staff, to make sure that you're all on the same page getting a role for that player. There's a lot to go into it for him to just sit there and say -- patting us on the back, saying, hey --

We feel good about our process and if we decide to make that pick or make that transaction at quarterback, it'll be a collaborative effort.

TERRY FONTENOT: It is funny when you see, I don't know how some other buildings operate different ways, obviously, but when there is a narrative that Arthur wants something that I didn't want -- it's just false. If anyone has been around us at all, they understand the way our process works, we're going through it together. We're all on the same page. Are we always going to agree in every moment? Of course not, but we both have humility and have mutual respect that we're going to talk through things, communicate through things. Obviously the coaches, scouts, we're going to take all the information and find the right player for the Falcons in every process. There hasn't been a decision that we haven't made like that, and there won't be one.

Our process, it is truly an inclusive process, and we're going to be on the same page with every decision we make.

Q. When it comes to players who are injured like a Jameson Williams, given their availability for next season where they might not be able to do everything, how does that affect what you might do in a year, whatever you end up picking, with those particular players?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, it's a weighing process. We actually had our second medical meeting yesterday afternoon and we went through every prospect and where they are in their rehab.

There's different ones. There are some players that you're not going to see work out, some players you're able to see work out, and we really lean on our doctors and our

training staff to tell us, okay, this is where the player is now, this is the expectation based off where they are in their rehab, and we expect a full recovery at this point. So we lean on them a lot in that process, and it's basically weighing, okay, this player might be a redshirt or this player is PUP, and we weigh the player's talent compared to what we're going to get on the back end and how long he's going to be out for.

It's really leaning on -- we're not doctors, we're not experts in that area but we lean on -- did you read a book about being a doctor and you think you're --

ARTHUR SMITH: I did. (Laughter.)

TERRY FONTENOT: But we really lean on them in that process and we really weigh it out, the player, the talent level of the player, and the medical, what we expect on the other end of it.

Q. So that wouldn't necessarily dissuade you from taking --

TERRY FONTENOT: No, not at all.

Q. How many first-round evaluations do you have this year?

TERRY FONTENOT: I won't give you the exact number.

ARTHUR SMITH: He's looking for the headline.

Q. You said it's not necessarily 32 --

TERRY FONTENOT: He wants one of us to say something he can put on PFT, one of the Michael Rothsteins -- but they're going to give you the -- but yeah, I won't tell you the first round, but there's rarely 32 first-round picks. So you always know at what point are you not going to get what you deem a first-round pick talent. But there's never -- usually not 32.

Q. As far as with Grady Jarrett, where do things stand in terms of communication with him or whether you think you'll get something done with him from a long-term perspective?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, we'll keep that private, all those communications between us and Todd and Grady and we'll keep those private and direct with them and keep that in house. But we've been clear with how we feel about Grady, the person, the player, all those things. Love Grady, but we'll keep that in house.

Q. With the influx of receiver trades this off-season

and contracts, has that changed how you evaluate that position and is there positional value at that position?

TERRY FONTENOT: It's a good question. It's a really good question because when you're looking at with different positions and when you stack the value of positions and you look at how much they cost, all those things, they all mean something.

That being said, I would say for us when we're evaluating, want to know what positions are important, it's more so what's important to Arthur and the offensive staff, and in that way what's important for our team in the way you value it. But you always have to think about those things, those numbers, at all the -- what people get paid and all those things are important, but I would say we lean more towards what's important to us in this building.

Q. Is there like two or three qualities that you would look for like a quarterback position? Are there two or three things you look at?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, I think there's a lot of different variables, and the one thing I think you can't be too critical on them, people play offense a lot of different ways, right, that's the talent pool coming through. So certainly you want to evaluate the decision making, and obviously accuracy is a big part, and then you evaluate the arm strength and how he fits and what you can do with him.

Obviously decision making and accuracy is a big part of it. Those are hard things to fix. The rest of it, you see what's the best fit, what he's doing -- what's he being asked to do. I think that's one thing that gets overlooked; it's easy just to criticize a guy, well, I don't see him throw these routes. Well, they may have never asked him to do that. Does he have a pocket feel? Is he a good decision maker? And is he accurate? I think you go from there, then you evaluate the arm strength and there's a lot of other factors, but that's kind of where you start.

Q. It's well-known how much money is coming off the books after next year. How important is it and is there any way to quantify how important it is for the roster, the franchise to be at a certain point by the end of next season so that you can go into free agency and sort of make those one or two moves or whatever to get to that next level?

TERRY FONTENOT: You want to start? Explain it a little more.

Q. Obviously it's been said many times, for a couple years you guys are hamstrung in terms of what you can do in free agency, so it's really important with the

moves you make to be right as you veer toward being a contender or whatever word you want to use. Once we get through this period here, as you enter free agency next year, is there any way to again say we need to be at this point by the end of this upcoming season? I'm not even talking about in terms of wins and losses, I'm talking about roster and having pieces to build on moving forward. Is there any way -- do you have any vision in your mind? You're not going to go out next summer and find seven players, but in terms of where you need to be in the building process?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, I would say we have a plan, and we're working to execute that plan. Regardless of the dead money this year and all those things, we're excited about the players that are in this building right now, and we need to go in this draft and add pieces and add -- again, we have five picks over Thursday and Friday and then nine total picks, and so we've got to hit on those players. Even after the draft, there's a bigger pool with COVID and the way everything happens, there's a bigger pool here so there's going to be some players that we mine after the draft that would have been drafted in another year, and I have confidence in our scouting staff and our coaches and developing those players that we're going to be able to bring in a lot of impact players, a lot of good players this year. Even the players that we sign, regardless how much we spend on players, we have confidence in our scouts and our coaches.

We see that even despite the challenges we had this year, we're going to like where we are as a team as we step into the year and we're going to continue to improve. There's never going to be a time that we have a lot of money and we're going to go out and be reckless, and we're still going to have a process and have discipline and do things the right way.

It's tough to -- I feel like we want to have a smart, tough, competitive team and we want to continue to improve every day, and that's how -- I think that's how I would judge it with the way we're competing and what we have in the building.

ARTHUR SMITH: Sounds good. Terry just answered it.

Q. Would it surprise you given how hungry teams in general are for quarterbacks if a quarterback wasn't drafted in the first 15 picks say?

TERRY FONTENOT: Man, this draft is -- I'm having trouble predicting it. It really is tough to anticipate the draft right now, what's going to happen in the first 10 picks or the first 15 picks. It's tough, man.

If you know, you tell me. It's funny, my phone -- I've got a million calls because everyone wants to talk through the draft and wants to gather information, but I don't have the answers right now. That's why we've got to be so prepared for a lot of different variables.

It really is difficult to predict. This is a very unique draft.

Q. What's the war room look like for you guys? Where are you going to be?

TERRY FONTENOT: I actually liked -- it's funny because a couple years ago when you had the COVID draft it was really efficient. I remember sitting in my living room and I had the little ones tugging on me and it was very efficient and it worked.

Last year we had a smaller -- not as many people in the draft room and it was outstanding. I think there's too many chairs and tables in our draft room right now. I will say that. I liked it when it was not as many people.

Q. In terms of when you're feeling this out, how much do you weigh younger -- draft picks versus supplementing with free agents? How do you philosophize that over the next two, three years?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, I think -- he's the same. We've got a lot of draft picks this year, and you'd like to hit on the majority of those. You've got younger players that are probably on more team-friendly deals, especially with the current cap situation.

In the short-term, yeah -- and I think every year you don't want to dismiss it. I know that's depending on where teams are at, they're just living through free agency. I think you get to the point where you can definitely supplement free agency, but you've hit on enough draft picks that you keep replenishing and you've got guys that you're developing. So if you do lose a guy that makes a lot of money in free agency, you've got another guy, so I think you can have a good balance, but where we're at currently from last year to this year with our cap issues is like, these draft picks, whether some of them are ready or not, they're going to have to play. You saw that last year with some of them where we had a plan and injuries come up and you got to play a guy earlier or you're able to be disciplined at certain spots maybe on the back end. Where we're at current for '22, this draft is obviously big for us.

Q. (Indiscernible).

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure, yeah, but I think if you have a good balance -- again, there's always a great unknown in free agency when you go out there and obviously you've

got to fill the cap space. But you'd like to be able to re-sign some of your own players and then supplement it where you're not just relying on one big free agency dump.

Q. The answer you just gave about a lot of young guys played last year and in normal circumstances wouldn't be playing this much, is that why it's unfair to judge --

ARTHUR SMITH: I think so. You've seen it both ways. Guys have had success year one and maybe they get comfortable and their habits change or they get content, and I think that's the hardest thing is for guys, the rare ones that stay motivated and they continue to do it year after year after year, and I've seen it the other way; guys may struggle, come from a completely foreign system, you believe in the player, hey, we're bringing you along, and then they really take off year two, year three. But some of them when we had a plan maybe not to play them as early as -- we had to. Well, somebody had to play, right?

That's why you just -- it's hard to say, hey, we're exactly -- this is where we're going to be in a year, so you can use Terry's words against him. We're not going to give you that satisfaction, but there's a lot of variables that happen, and that's why -- I'm not being evasive, but it's not fair to some of these players after year one to say this guy is riding off into -- they're already getting his bust ready in Canton or this guy can't play.

Is that fair?

Q. Can I ask about running backs and especially with Cordarrelle; he was obviously a revelation last year, but do you anticipate him in a dual role?

ARTHUR SMITH: D-Led has got him at wide receiver.

TERRY FONTENOT: Is that where he's got him in his depth chart?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think D-Led has got him at wide receiver. I don't know, that's news to me. We just hopefully expand on it. We'll have to see.

Again, if we feel good and we have a running back that's a rookie that's going to be -- we feel good about going into the season, his role may evolve back on the perimeter. It's just depends. We may have weeks where we've got to play him, give him more carries. We obviously like the football player. We appreciate what CP did for us last year and what he's going to do for us in the future, but that's what's fun about coaching a guy like CP, because you can move him around a lot of different spots.

You still got him wide receiver go with? All right,

interesting. You've still got the safeties wrong. Not to say I'm auditing you or anything.

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