

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Terry Fontenot

Arthur Smith

Draft Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: We always start with the makeup. We love the way the young man is wired. He's a tough, smart, competitive football player. The way he works, the way he competes, we are very excited to bring him.

He fits our ethos. He fits the culture. Everything that we want to be as a football team here, he fits it. He checks all those boxes and as a player. He's big, he's athletic, the versatility, things he can do on the field, the catch radius. We are very excited to make him a Falcon.

Q. The speed, what time did you have on seeing the numbers on that?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's great, we worked him out, and we felt pretty comfortable with his speed and everything, the tape. So we are not going to discuss internal measurements we had on guys. But you just watch the tape, he's plenty fast enough.

Q. Is that top secret?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's not top secret, but it's our intellectual property. Watch him in the slot? The guy is a dynamic player. Plays a lot of position. He's everything you want in the middle makeup. Like Terry said, he's wired the right way. We're excited that he's a part of the Falcons.

Q. How much work did you guys do on him versus maybe --

ARTHUR SMITH: Very extensive. Mentioned the other day, part of the process, we were able to get back out on the road, so we felt very confident in exactly the kind of player we were bringing in here.

TERRY FONTENOT: It means a lot to spend time with those guys and get around them and go to work them out in their place and really get your hands on them. That's really important, and we are very impressed with

everything we did with him.

Q. What went through taking a receiver versus there were edge rushers on the board, a highly rated offensive tackle, what went into a receiver versus other positions of need?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, every position is a need. We trusted our board and where it fell, so we are very excited about the player. And obviously if you're paying attention after our pick, you saw the run on wide-out, which is we predicted was going to happen.

All the factors led into it, but we also trusted our process and we were not going to reach. We talked about the other day about need. Things are even, sure. Things aren't, that's why you do all this work. You don't all of a sudden get on the clock and start dismissing all the work the scouts have put in, the whole process. We talk about being collaborative, and then you go away from strategies just because you're on the clock.

Q. So it was pretty much just how board fell? You weren't thinking offense, defensive position, whatever, versus how things fell when you got to eight?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, stack the board and he's the best player on board, and we're excited to take him off. Obviously if a defensive player would have been there that was best player we would have took him. Drake was the best player, and we're excited about him.

Q. Anything in the first seven picks that surprised you at all?

TERRY FONTENOT: No. No. Obviously it doesn't always go off on the order, but I don't think there were any surprises. What about you guys? Do you think there were any surprises?

Q. Yeah. No. 3. We didn't know, what the medicals look like, that's the problem. That jumbled stuff up a little bit. Should be another busy day starting tomorrow for you guys?

TERRY FONTENOT: It's exciting. We are looking through the board, and it's cool to have a day to digest and look at players that are there. And as we count, okay, this is our group, who do we expect to be there, and there are some good football players at every position. So we are really excited.

Q. In the middle it got kind of sketchy with all the trades. Where were y'all when that was going down?

TERRY FONTENOT: I mean, we always answer our phone, and obviously people call and want to know if you want to get back in. But we felt like -- we weigh everything and we talk about how much things would cost, and we'll do the same thing tomorrow. We had those discussions, but we felt comfortable to be patient and get rolling tomorrow.

Q. Did y'all have any offers to move down?

TERRY FONTENOT: We discussed some offers. It's just a weighing process, though, because sometimes like what happens is people will call and throw something out there that might not make sense. So it's all a weighing process, comparing the player to what you can get. And so we did have some discussions.

Q. How much did you consider a quarterback?

TERRY FONTENOT: Same way we consider all the other positions. We took the best player off the board.

Q. The phone calls you received at about the eighth pick, would you have had to move way down or just a little bit?

TERRY FONTENOT: We talked to teams in the middle and the bottom. We talked to basically everybody. We talked to enough teams. And it obviously wasn't enough, wasn't something that made sense to us as we weighed the pros and cons to actually move out of that pick.

Q. How much of it was you really liked this player?

TERRY FONTENOT: It was more so we love the player, we are excited about him, but also a lot of those calls people were just kind of checking in, as opposed to someone that really wants to give up a lot to get up.

Q. Never got serious in your view?

TERRY FONTENOT: No.

Q. Arthur, in your evaluation of the wide receivers, how much of a role did Drake's size play?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's a factor, but it's not -- I know the popular narrative is it has to be a this height or we want the bigger receiver. It'd certainly help, but that's not -- there's some really good players that got taken. Well, we'll play with anybody that can help this team.

We just liked what the player brought to this team, how he will be used for us and how he complements some of the other pieces we have. We were ecstatic. Obviously some really good players taken the way the board was stacked, and when he was still sitting there, and to Terry's point, there was no offer that made any sense, and not to get into the details in his job, so we are really, really happy that Drake is a Falcon.

Q. What does his production tell you, the targets and catches per game?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, here is what you're looking at. He played two different spots. In '20, he's inside. And then they moved him outside. So that shows us a lot. You see a lot of different route tree with him. You see the stuff outside you saw from the '21 season.

And go back to 2020 season and watch him inside, he's hard to bring down. He's a catch-and-run guy, and he's also very contested, super competitive. The mental makeup, we're ecstatic about. He's a very versatile player, even at his size. Some of those guys get pigeonholed, oh, he's only an X or he's only outside. That's kind of nonsense. The way we play and the way the guys move around, you have to be able to do both.

TERRY FONTENOT: The competitor sticks out so much. When you watch the tape, try to find some plays of him going out of bounds. When he's near that sideline, he's a physical player, and he's going to lower his head, even if it's for another inch, but he's not running out of bounds.

He's fighting for every -- and he's one of those guys that we enjoyed our meetings with him, but you don't even have to meet him and know that he loves ball and he's passionate and all those things when you put on the tape and see the way he plays the game. That's why we are so excited.

Q. Can you talk about the run of wide receivers. There were three in a row after the tackle. Was there much separation in your mind in that top group of wide receivers that were four, five, six, seven? Was he far ahead? Want to show me your board?

ARTHUR SMITH: We are not going to do that.

Q. I know you're not. Was there much separation --

ARTHUR SMITH: Now you're talking hypothetical, subjectivity. There are a lot of good players. They all have different skill sets. We are really happy with the fit for us. And really that's all that matters.

Q. Talk about complements. What do you think about just the size with Kyle Pitts last year and Drake London this year? Two big targets with pretty good catch radiuses. Your thoughts of them being together on the field, and what you think you can get done in the red zone?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's really all over the field. We need more trips to the red zone, too, and we have to be more efficient. He's a good player. We're obviously excited. We have a good vision for him. He has to go out there and earn it, but they are different players, too. Again, look right out there and look at the numbers and say, oh, they are both tall, yeah, but they are different players. They complement each other well.

So we are excited. He'll come in here, and he'll add a lot to this offense and help us be more efficient. Obviously we need to get more explosive, too. He brings that to the table as well.

Q. The big guys out there, Drake London, he's had a nickname --

ARTHUR SMITH: I don't know about that one, Twin Towers, we'll see if that one sticks (Laughter) self-imposed nickname for the two of them.

TERRY FONTENOT: Not smart.

ARTHUR SMITH: All it does is give more material for the team meeting. I'm actually fired up for that.

TERRY FONTENOT: Not good. You didn't have to bring that up.

Q. That wasn't my actual question.

ARTHUR SMITH: I just used it as an opportunity to talk to Drake, yeah. Just put it on the tee for me, thank you.

Q. Him in the slot -- off sides, I don't want you to give the whole playbook away, but when you envision ways you can use him, what excites you about his versatility?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's just that, if you're going to be a team that motions or you're going to play in certain condensed

splits, especially in early downs, you've seen him go inside the numbers. A lot of guys, they only play one position, some of these offenses, they only stay on the same side.

It does give you a lot of confidence, as much as when you like to move different formations, different personnel groups. You see him run the routes that we would ask him to run inside. You see him make those contested "got to have it" catches one-on-one outside.

So you're very confident in the player and what you're getting. Obviously it's our job to keep developing and enhancing those skills. So like I said, it's a really valuable offensive weapon for us.

Q. You talk about how they translate into the pros, can he be a contributor year one?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's the intent, you take a guy that high, but again, we'll bring him on at his speed. So certainly when you put a pick that high on a player, there's an expectation that this guy needs to contribute. No different than Kyle last year. But we have all been around it, and we are not going to expedite. He is coming off of an injury last season, he's good to go, which we still have to be smart as we bring him along and get to camp.

Q. If did you have a time on when you want him to be full go?

ARTHUR SMITH: You can ask D. Led about my timelines.

Little late here for them.

Q. He told us that he's still working to build his endurance back up. Do you expect him to have any restrictions as you're getting started with rookie camp?

ARTHUR SMITH: The way it's set up now, some of the rookie camps, the old days, D. Led, used to be Full Metal Jacket when they started. You have to be smart. Some of these guys, they have on the banquet circuit, they have been taken a million visits, trying to work out in hotel gyms. You have to be smart when these guys get here and build them up. That's for all of our players.

Q. What did your son have mocked?

TERRY FONTENOT: He had his whole mock Drafts. It's fun. It's really fun. He gets into it, and it's cool. We have a building here where -- we love families, love the families around, and our kids are always here. And it's pretty special for him to be around. But he's definitely excited.

Q. Was he right with your pick?

TERRY FONTENOT: I can't reveal his picks. We've got to make sure we keep him off the mic, too.

Q. Is he getting his allowance this week or not?

TERRY FONTENOT: He missed a baseball game to be here today and he's so cocky, he thinks they are not going to win because he wasn't at the baseball game. He's a different kid.

Q. Did he give you a hard time?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, he's excited about the pick.

Q. I'm sorry if you said this, but how many times did you personally work out Drake and/or talk to him in person? I don't think that's giving anything away, what was your intellectual property --

ARTHUR SMITH: I have to throw buzzwords at you, new material at you guys, mix it up.

TERRY FONTENOT: Personal workout and a couple meetings.

Q. Were you sold like right away that this could be your guy?

TERRY FONTENOT: The entire process, we liked him the entire process from the meetings, the February meetings with the scouts, everybody loved him, and then we met him at the Combine, and spent time with him there and went out and had a personal workout, spent time with him, talked to him a lot. He checked all the boxes.

Q. Can't worry about what other teams are doing, but after Drake there was a run of wide receivers. What did you make of that section of the Draft?

TERRY FONTENOT: I think we kind of expected it. Arthur brought it up, and we predicted it was probably going to happen. There was going to be a run on those guys. That's kind of how it happens. There was -- defense happens and there was a run on receivers. I think we expected that.

Q. You've touched on this a little bit, but when we talked with Drake, he stressed he wants to earn it and nothing given to him. Did you get that sense when you talked with him and the due diligence you did, do people match that up with what he said to you guys?

TERRY FONTENOT: No doubt, that's who he is. You

guys will be around him a little bit and when you're around him, you'll see that and when we're around him, we see that. That's who he is.

He's a tough football player, and he's wired the right way, and we are not going to bring -- we would not be bringing a guy in the building if he wasn't. That means a lot. That's who he is.

Q. You talked in the pre-Draft visit about the rising receiver contract, another big trade today with A.J. You guys love Drake London, obviously, but the receiver value as a whole, how much does that play in drafting him tonight?

TERRY FONTENOT: He was really the best player on the board as it came off. So like we said, all those things are always factors but for us, we stay true to the board and he was the best player on the board when we took him.

Q. Did anything surprise you tonight even after you guys picked?

TERRY FONTENOT: Nothing crazy. I mean, it was 32 good football players went tonight. I can't think of anything crazy.

ARTHUR SMITH: No. Kind of what we expected, regardless the hype and whatever. When you get closer to it you realize what's fluff and what's not. Pretty accurate.

Q. What was the difference between going through it the second time as opposed to the first time last year?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, we had to wait a little bit longer for our pick, but they actually went fast. They weren't -- they were turning those picks in, so it went a lot faster.

But outside of that, I don't think -- I mean, we're a few picks down hopefully. Next year we're waiting a lot longer and as we get this thing rolling, we're not picking in the Top-10 anymore.

Q. Looking ahead, what's your process tomorrow, four picks?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, so we basically have the players stacked and we'll sit down and go through them and really talk about our stack, and we'll make those phone calls like we always do with the teams in front of us and the teams behind us and gather that information, and because it's all a weighing process.

So we are making a decision on these are players that are going to be there and these are players we expect and let's

weigh what it will cost to go up and what we'll gain to come back and just weigh all that out. We'll spend time going through our stack.

The players are already stacked, but we'll just go back through it, spend some time with the coaches and pull some names off the board tomorrow.

ARTHUR SMITH: We'll make sure we get some stronger coffee for some of you guys. You look a little sleepy.
(Laughter)

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