

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Terry Fontenot

Arthur Smith

Draft Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: We are really excited about how things fell today. We wanted to come in and get better, and we did. We added four good football players. We added size, speed, athleticism, toughness, makeup, football IQ, everything we value we added to this team in every phase, all three phases, starting with Ebiketie, we call him AK.

We are excited. The reason we traded up is we had him high on the board and we said we wanted to go up and get him. We gave up that fourth and we are excited we added a pass rusher that wins a lot of different ways, he's got variety and he plays with motor and he's a top makeup and he's going to fit in here and eats going to come in here and go to work.

Troy Andersen, man, excited about that player. You look at his measurables, high football IQ, the things he can bring to this defense we couldn't be more excited. Again, makeup, skill set.

Then we get to Desmond Ridder, big athletic makeup, traits, tools. Very excited. He's obviously excited to be here.

And then de-Anglo low could he, excited about him when we brought him in to visit we told him we had a feeling he's going to be a Falcon and he's going to be able to play for the home team and he is, another pressure player that plays with violence and toughness any game you put on. So very excited about that group.

Q. Taking with Desmond, he stressed how excited he was to be with Marcus Mariota who he says he compares himself to and others compare him to.

ARTHUR SMITH: Well they are both very athletic quarterbacks and that's a good thing that he's looked up to Marcus because it will be a really good room. Obviously Marcus, he's talked to you guys, he's stressed how excited

he is for the opportunity.

We had competition, certainly, but that's at every spot. So Marcus being the veteran, it gives us a chance going forward but again, as always with any position on this team, the best player is going to play but obviously Marcus being the vet, that's the way it will go starting out. But nothing is ever written in stone. We understand that. When you have the right guys, that's how that room works, especially where we're at right now currently with our program.

Q. This is for both of you. Was Desmond a guy you felt like you could get at 74 or did you more feel like he fell in your lap and you've got to tape him at that point in the Draft?

TERRY FONTENOT: I'd say we stayed true to the integrity of the board, and we don't want to breach at any points. That scouting department led by Kyle Smith working along with the coaches in a collaborative effort do a great job setting that board. And we stayed true to the board and took the best players off and he was meant to be there at that time and we are excited to make that call.

Q. Are you surprised he was there at 74?

ARTHUR SMITH: Look, I don't know, I know that's good for storytelling and whatever, surprise. Nothing really surprises you any more. There's so much, when you look at how everything is covered now, what's really true. That's Terry's point, you have to stay disciplined to the board. There's a lot of good players out there. We're at the Draft and it's a heck of an opportunity to come in here and compete. We are happy with all of them. We're happy with Malone where he was. I have a hard time saying surprised. We stayed disciplined and obviously our scouts did a hell of a job. They knocked it out of the park and pretty much fell the way we expected and so that's what you want. You're never going to be at 100 percent because everybody has a lot of different styles and flavors that they value.

We are so excited about the four guys we drafted here tonight.



Q. I know you're not surprised by anything, but quarterbacks are viewed a certain way in this league. Were you surprised that there was not a quarterback taken until you took Desmond tonight?

ARTHUR SMITH: No. No.

Q. Why not?

ARTHUR SMITH: Because, again -- you're trying to go with a narrative of about -- I understand what you're saying, you want the sensationalist, oh, wow, quarterbacks dropped.

Go back to the history of this league. It's a hell of an opportunity for any of them. And you never know, certain people's needs, the way it falls, obviously a run on certain positions, you see that happen all the time. You know, guys value certain positions, and you saw a run on receivers, you see a run on pass rushers, you see a run on corners. And that's not a knock on any other position.

Again, nothing surprised me. And like I said, our scouts did a hell of a job the way they set that board, and we are excited as hell about the four players we added tonight.

Q. When you look at Troy Andersen, starts at linebacker for him, but is he the type of player, you look at him, like, oh, man, there's theoretically so much I can do with him here? Or do you see him strictly as a linebacker?

ARTHUR SMITH: You say "strictly." You asking we're going to use him at quarterback?

TERRY FONTENOT: Someone on TV said that.

ARTHUR SMITH: We had good background on him, not only from the scouting side, but the coaching side. Mike Petri was with him early in his career. He is a rare athlete, a guy that clearly, when people say, oh, that guy is a football player, the guy has got great instincts, played multiple spots, he's got great spatial awareness, certainly his measurables are off the charts, but you don't take guys just on measurables, the guy can play.

We feel good about the competition in that room with Rashaan, you bring Troy in there, you got Mike Walker in there, there's good competition in that room.

Q. Obviously you went into the Draft with a certain number of picks, and everyone is always going to freak out or have a narrative based on your first pick, what happened yesterday, last night you took a wide

receiver, and everybody was like, got to fix the defense, got to fix the defense, maybe we need linemen. Today three of your four picks are on the defensive side of the ball, all tough guys, couple edge guys. I know this isn't your No. 1 objective to quiet fans or anything, but about what you want here and you know what you need to do here?

TERRY FONTENOT: What I would say to that is we don't -- progress over perfection, right. It's one bite at a time. You can't do it all at once. So we want to add one player at a time.

So it could have fell to where we got two offensive players in the second round, and we would have been fine with that because that's how the board fell, and we know we are not solving all the problems. We are doing it one player at a time, and we are focusing on the process. And so when you're focusing on that, we are not even thinking about anything on the outside. We are bringing in good players, one player at a time.

When we got into that second round, we are sitting down this morning and, okay, we want to go get AK. If he's there, we are going to get him. And that wasn't because we had not taken -- we didn't take the deepest player in the first round. It's because he was the best player on that board.

Same when we got down to Troy. Man, we were excited he was here, but it could have been another -- if it was an offensive player, we would have been fine with that.

One player at a time. And it couldn't have fell any better. We are excited how it fell to us, but we are not trying to reach any spot.

Q. Can you add to that in terms of the type of team that you want to build in terms of toughness, physicality?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, if you're going to say that stuff and you don't go get those guys, you're just a hypocrite. You want a fast team, go get some fast players. If you want a tough team, go get guys that are tough.

You certainly can push guys and enhance and develop them, but again, been my experience, if you don't have a strategy and then you actually don't go and implement it, you're just fluff, right.

So there is certainly a theme to the players we drafted, but we felt good about it, whether it would have been an offensive or defensive player. And it really worked out well. That's why Terry and I are both up here, how good of a job

our scouts did.

So our strategy as it fell really worked well for us tonight. And certainly it helped, too, that this were positions with needs. You can say we have needs everywhere. That's not a shot at anybody currently on our roster, it's just where we are currently in the building process.

So yeah, so if you're going to say you're going to be a tough team, go get tough players. Simple as that.

Q. Desmond talked about the meeting in Cincinnati at pro day. What did he do to impress the massive entourage y'all took up?

ARTHUR SMITH: We took an entourage everywhere.

Q. Looked a little bit deeper that day.

ARTHUR SMITH: Just optics, what camera angle caught you, right.

That's what you want, no different than -- if you want to use the word entourage, Terry's entourage, we went out to L.A., we went to Cincinnati, we are fortunate to be able to work in an organization that allows you to go do that.

Des, he's made of the right stuff, too. We have a lot of good background on him. Obviously, you watch the tape, you saw what he did at that program in Cincinnati, you felt very comfortable when you see him. And when you got to meet him in person -- I've got a ton of respect for Luke Fickell and program in Cincinnati. It's really impressive what they do and the way their culture is.

And that guy, Des went in there, and he won. And he'll come in here, and he'll compete, and he'll do the right things. And like I said, D. Led, we are excited to bring a player like that in here.

Q. Did he impress you on the board?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's all a part of it. It's all a part of it. You want to check all the boxes, right. You're going to have interviews, the times you get at the Combine, whatever exposures you get to them at Senior Bowl, and you just piece them all together.

A lot of people can go in there, and they can fake it for 15, 20 minutes. And you just keep chipping away, put all the pieces together. But certainly an important part of the process, but it's not the only part. I think that's the best way to put it.

TERRY FONTENOT: It was cool without those restrictions

and being able to go out and being able to take everybody in all the places. Before that pro day we got to meet his family and I got to talk to his mom. And you got it from her, and she's competitive, and he wasn't highly recruited coming out, and he had a little chip on his shoulder.

But you really get to know those players when you get around their families and see they are wired all the right way. I don't know if you got to meet Drake's family, they are all here today, but his father, his mother, Juan and Cindy, great people, his sister. You see what they really come from and why they are the men that they are.

All those exposures are really important, being able to bring everybody. It's really important.

ARTHUR SMITH: I'll add a little story. It didn't move the meter for us. We go in there, and he somehow dug up an old Louisville bobblehead of Dave Ragone. They had a connection, as small as the world is sometimes. That didn't move the meter, but it was a good job. You know, I applaud the effort by him. If we can find a copy of that, may have to look on eBay if it's still up.

TERRY FONTENOT: The worst part is -- I won't tell that part (Laughter).

Q. Now you've got to tell.

TERRY FONTENOT: I'll do it off the record later. I'll do it later. (Chuckling.)

Q. We just chatted with Des, and he seemed pretty mature for a starter. Where do you see his development and his game as a QB right now?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, like all these guys, I mean, there's always things to work on, but he certainly has played a lot of good, high-level football. And there's things we'll come in here and ask him to do.

The good thing is you're playing with guys with similar skillsets. When you're putting game plans together, it is refreshing because a lot of times if you've got guys with very different skillsets. You're going to have to have a plan, hey, this guy goes out, here is where we have to go.

So they are both really easy, all three of them. Feleipe, too. Feleipe plays multiple positions for us. But that part is nice, when you put them together and how we are going to play, that part does help when they have similar skillsets.

Q. For both of you guys, I know you follow your board, but I thought it was interesting you draft a guy from Western Kentucky, Montana State, smaller schools.

What does that tell you about your scouting process and finding guys maybe everywhere, maybe different than just traditional big schools?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, I think the staff does an excellent job, and we don't discriminate. We are at every school and going through players. If you can play football, we are going to find you.

And it says a lot about the coaches as well that, hey, we are going to dig, and we are going to stick to the process. When you stick to the process, there are good players in a lot of difference places. And we have a staff that's going to work hard to find them.

ARTHUR SMITH: Part of it, too, it was refreshing that some of those guys were at All-Star games. Four of those guys today, they were all at the Senior Bowl.

So it helps. It's all part of the process. Guys that go over the top of them, you bring them in, they have got the meetings, but you get down to the Senior Bowl and you have exposure to them there. And it's not just because they went to the Senior Bowl is why they drafted them, but it's nice when you are able to evaluate that as part of the process as well.

Q. Off the top of your head, can you remember a guy that had a résumé like Andersen? Valedictorian in high school, started at three positions. But do you remember a guy who had those kind of accomplishments?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's a good question, and I can't think of anybody like that right now.

ARTHUR SMITH: It's goes back to the body of work. You've got a very solid idea. Then he's got to go out here and prove it in the National Football League. But it gives you a lot of comfort in that you know the character you're getting. Doesn't mean necessarily all of a sudden -- but he's got the right makeup and he's been consistent in his life.

Q. On Tuesday you talked about accuracy and decision-making when it comes to quarterback, kind of like the first few tenets. What is it you saw out of Desmond versus some of the other guys who were --

ARTHUR SMITH: That's just ridiculous.

Q. What did you see out of Desmond?

ARTHUR SMITH: We like his skill set and leadership qualities, too. He's played at a high level. It's impressive

what that program did. And like all these guys, you get them and there's certain things that maybe they were successful in college, and that's our part in coaching, to enhance some of those skills.

The mental makeup of them, I thought his decision-making, I thought he had a good feel in the pocket. And there's a couple little minor technical things, you can always work with the quarterbacks. That gave us a lot of comfort.

Q. Was there a specific stretch of games that he played that sold you on that from the tape?

ARTHUR SMITH: The ones that you look at that are certainly impressive is what they did when they went to South Bend. But he's very consistent.

Q. You've been very consistent yesterday and today about how committed you are to stay true to the board, but you said a few days ago, you wanted to add to the quarterback room whether it be in Draft, free agency -- did you have preference of those options to have somebody from this Draft added to that quarterback room?

TERRY FONTENOT: No. No. And it's funny, when I said that, I said we could come out of this Draft with the quarterback, we could trade for quarterback, we could, and I started getting texts when I walked out that we were trading for certain guys.

And obviously I saw a report that we were, and so the telephone game gets played. There was never a time where me and Arthur said we have to come out of this Draft with a quarterback. We didn't. We really stayed true to the process and stayed true to the integrity of the board. We really did.

And he was the best player at the time, and that's why we took him off the board. We had it stacked. There was never a time where we said we gotta -- if we would have come out of this Draft and it wouldn't have fell that way, we wouldn't have got a quarterback. We are excited that it fell this way and excited Desmond is here.

Q. Keeping those options open, do you feel as obligated to make calls exploring the trade possibilities discussed in the media for veterans, or do you not pursue that?

TERRY FONTENOT: We are never going to close any doors at any position. We are always -- we answer every call and we explore every opportunity.

ARTHUR SMITH: One thing, too, I want to put context to

this because we talk about the board, just the one thing, and I feel like I need to address this because the board doesn't mean if you've got five left tackles there, you're not taking five in a row. That's the one thing I just want to put that -- I shouldn't have to, but at times you need to.

When you say the board, and we talked about it before, like things being even, sure, but we are not going to sit there and draft seven corners in a row.

TERRY FONTENOT: Unless they are all the highest players (Laughter).

ARTHUR SMITH: Then I probably wouldn't show up to this.

Q. The way offenses are going, drafting seven quarters --

ARTHUR SMITH: The right ones.

Q. You drafted a second guy who gave himself a nickname.

ARTHUR SMITH: It's actually refreshing. You talking about The Doctor?

TERRY FONTENOT: Max told us that. He said he calls himself The Doctor.

ARTHUR SMITH: It's great.

TERRY FONTENOT: Arthur is writing it all down.

ARTHUR SMITH: Keeps it fresh. You don't want your messaging to get stale. You are looking for new material.

TERRY FONTENOT: We have The Doctor, Twin Towers.

ARTHUR SMITH: I hope some of them made great predictions, those are also fun to ask about.

Q. And three guys play basketball?

ARTHUR SMITH: Anybody got the Grizzlies score?

It helps, multi-sport guys, with athletes.

Q. When somebody drafts a quarterback in the first round, everyone is going to write quarterback of the future. So what should people think or say when you draft a quarterback in the third round?

ARTHUR SMITH: Still, the guy, he's got an opportunity. Just because you're a first rounder didn't mean you're

going to make it. There's a graveyard full of them. That's what history will tell you.

Has to be the right guy, right fit, right system. Certainly you've got to acknowledge when you take somebody super high like you're talking about in the first round, there is pressure to play them sooner rather than later.

I think most places are in a position where they don't have that flexibility to sit behind Brett Favre, right. It's a heck of an opportunity. They have to be the right system, the right fit, the right environment. And I think what we provide here for Desmond is we'll see what happens, and we're excited to have Marcus, too. Like I said, Marcus is a veteran, he's got experience. And with any position here, we have competition. It certainly helps, and the best guys will always play.

TERRY FONTENOT: Arthur always says that to the players, it doesn't matter how you got here, first round, second round, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh, or eighth, doesn't matter how you got here, doesn't matter how much you got paid, when you come in, it's a competition at every spot, and the best players are going to play.

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