

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Postgame Press Conference



Atlanta - 23, Cleveland - 20

ARTHUR SMITH: It's never perfect in an NFL game. That's why I really -- going through the first half, we knew it was going to be -- the way that they played, they were going to try to grind it out, but they made the big stops when they had to.

Regardless of how that first half went. And then the second half, they played really well, especially down the stretch.

Really proud of these guys. That was a really good team win. That's what we pride ourselves on. We're a team. We've got contributions from all over the place.

Q. To that extent, crunching the numbers, this defense is 3 for 8 when stopping opponents in the red zone over the last two games. What have you seen from your defense inside the 20?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, our defense.

Q. Yes.

ARTHUR SMITH: It's always going to be about us and the team. So our defense, we adjust. We got really, really smart players and coaches, and certain things, that's what it is. It's a constant work in progress. There's a lot of things we'll have to clean up tomorrow. We've got to be objective.

There's some things we've done differently down there. Those guys communicate well, and a lot of times it's a chess match. I thought they handled it well today.

Q. What did you think of the spark that Caleb Huntley provided there at the end?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah. He's another guy in our program, and we believe in this team and guys, and that's our charge. As a coach, everybody on this roster, you never

know when you need next guy has to step up. Caleb did that today. So did Tyler Allgeier, and so did Avery Williams. He had a big run late in the game.

We had C.P. early. That was a good contribution in the run game.

Q. When you put Caleb in, things were dragging a little bit. Did you put him in for a spark, or was that just part of the normal rotation?

ARTHUR SMITH: Sometimes you get in there, and they have a say too. We didn't execute well. I think we had three drives in that draft. I think we had 17 plays, if I'm not mistaken, at the half, whatever was on that surface at halftime.

So we come out, try to take a shot. We don't hit it. You kind of get off track. You got to punt. You come back. Try to do a little misdirection. Nothing there. Get Drake going, get the face mask right, and then you play it in their hand and we're really off track.

So then coming back out, we knew we wanted to get back to our game. It wasn't perfect. Got the pick on the movement pass. Ward made a pretty good play. And that defense did a nice job. That was a big stop by them, sudden change.

Then we came back out, and we were just playing our game. In a lot of those first start of the series, put us off track. That's credit Cleveland, and we've got to execute cleaner, and certainly I can look at everything I was doing, and then we're going to make a statement. That's what we did.

Had nothing to do with Caleb and nothing to do with anything else other than playing our style, and that's what we did.

Q. Those 14 straight runs, is that what you're talking about?

ARTHUR SMITH: Absolutely. When the line is running like that, that's what you call being in the flow. Proud of



those guys. We knew it was going to be a big boy fight. Seeing the run attempts, and I always thought the team that ran the ball better today was going to win. That held true thankfully.

Q. Kind of following on all of that, when you go to the decision to go to Caleb and Tyler in that drive, how much of that was because of Cordarrelle throughout the week, and how much of that was planned?

ARTHUR SMITH: I'm saying this, and I'm being dead serious. I believe anybody is up on game day. Mike Pitre does a helluva job. He's got his hand on it. If I need somebody on a play, like I wanted Avery on a certain play to setup, I'll call on him. I've got all the faith in Mike Pitre.

I don't care who is out there. I believe in everybody we put up on game day, whether it's receiver, running back, tight end, Feleipe, I don't care because I believe in these guys.

It's not a status thing. It's not a star, fan thing. We're trying to win the game. Mike thought Caleb could get a couple reps in there, and he proved that he was right. That's a credit to Caleb, and Mike Pitre does a helluva job.

Q. Going with that, when he does get one or two carries and he's going so positively, is it one of those things where you just ride it until --

ARTHUR SMITH: Certainly. You know what, Caleb played, he had a first real carry a couple of weeks ago. It may not mean a lot to some people, but to kind of get your feet wet so to speak. I was very confident in Caleb. That's why we put him up.

Like I said, we knew what kind of game it was going to be. That's why we only had four wide receivers up.

Q. Defensively, for at least a portion of the first half, you went with a similar defense you used last week against Seattle.

ARTHUR SMITH: Which one is that?

Q. With kind of the five linebackers on the field.

ARTHUR SMITH: It looks like something you can play different fronts, very multiple. They were things, we get a lot of speed when you put Troy and Mike Walker. Sometimes it looks like base, you can go five down, sometimes four down, three down. Those guys are fast enough to play in the slot, and that's what having versatile players does for you.

So you can mix and match, whether we put Mike Ford in

the nickel, Mike Walker, Troy Andersen, Dee Alford. That's why I get excited. That's why I'm thankful to coach this team.

Q. Is that something when you're playing run heavy teams like Cleveland is, like Seattle was last week --

ARTHUR SMITH: Depends on the scheme and what they're trying to do. They run multiple personnel. It's very similar to Cleveland, little different scheme, but similar mindset. They run a lot of different guys in there, give you a lot of different looks. They shift. They motion. Some of it you're playing situationally, and some of it you're playing personnel. That's the chess match.

Kevin Stefanski, Bill Callahan, and that whole Cleveland staff, they do a helluva job.

Q. Coach, you have a little symmetry in these back-to-back wins with the defense gaining a sack and getting an interception to win the game. How important is it to see that consistency to be able to not just close the game out, but close it out in that type of decisive fashion back to back weeks?

ARTHUR SMITH: Most of these games come down to the end, whether we've got to go put a drive together. Certainly you'd love to have a touchdown there, but in my biased opinion, I've got to put Koo out there. In these clutch situations, I've got my money on Koo. Koo bangs it through. They use their time-outs, and that's the game you're playing.

Not only that, what I liked about that last drive too was they checked us up, and they threw what I call a big box fade. Bell caught it on Alford, and then Dee didn't flinch. Get up and play the next situation. They run a screen. They get guys down the field. They take the penalty. You kind of got a chance to pin your ears back and then be able to get that pick the next play.

That says a lot about the kind of guys we've got.

Q. Congratulations on the win.

ARTHUR SMITH: Thanks.

Q. What was your message to the team after the game?

ARTHUR SMITH: You just said it. We're a team, and we'll find different ways, and we believe in these guys, and we've got to keep improving. These guys believe, and that's the way they work.

So hopefully we can get back. We've got a huge divisional game down in Tampa next week, and we've got to get ready. We've got to go in there and assess where we're at tomorrow and onto Tampa.

Q. Speaking of the screen game -- or the defense, how well they played the screen game, was that something you saw on tape, or was that defense reading and reacting?

ARTHUR SMITH: Some of it and guys being disciplined. They had a pretty good call. We were pressuring. Guys being able to read out of it, and that's kind of the game. You get a feel. Some linemen, maybe they give it away because they're too quick, they let you beat them too quick. We had different calls in there too. It's instinct, knowing the situation, and being able to make those plays.

Q. Do you recall a possession in the second half where you had Holland for Hayward?

ARTHUR SMITH: No different than having Huntley and Allgeier in there. We've got a team. We're going to continue no different if Troy plays a little bit. Landman had a package. Like I said, we believe in this team.

Q. In some positions, though, like at corner, that's not always something you see in the NFL. I was just wondering what you were seeing from your guys that tells you you can do it.

ARTHUR SMITH: A lot of guys I see that can help us win. Doesn't matter whether we roll tight ends or receivers or backs, D-linemen, corners, safeties. We believe in our guys that are up, and we'll continue to work. That's all it was.

Q. You alluded to it a little bit earlier, but it looked like they were looking for Dee Alford a couple of times. Were you surprised he was able to respond in the way he did at the end?

ARTHUR SMITH: No. I wouldn't say they were necessarily looking at him. Sometimes it happens to be the coverage. They try to get indicators. Sometimes they get them. Sometimes they don't. A lot of that is, when they're packaging plays, I'd say it's more about what they thought the look was.

So like I said, they thought -- they guessed right. They didn't guess right. They had a tell, but they had something completely different the next time, and we were able to get the sack. They thought they were getting it again, and they weren't.

That's the game within the game. They checked to it, happened to get man, and they got it a big box. Some people call it stomp route, have called it a hundred thousand things. That's all it was. I didn't see it like they were attacking.

Q. You call this game a big boy fight, which I like by the way. That's probably going to be my headline. But for run blocking purposes, what did you see from your offensive front? I know last week you talked about it's all 11 blocking, but what do you see from them?

ARTHUR SMITH: To be able to -- you know, we didn't have a lot of snaps early in the game. Like I said, credit to Cleveland. There's kind of a lull really by both teams that started that third quarter. It was getting kind of quiet in there.

Those guys keep swinging. That's the way they work. We know it's going to be a challenge. We're not creeping up on anybody. People know we want to run the football.

That's what fires you up, and it won't be that way every week. We're going to have a challenge. We know how competitive it is. But when you can run the ball, when they know you're going to run it, that speaks volumes about your guys.

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