

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Coach Arthur Smith

Postgame Press Conference



Falcons 37, Panthers 34

ARTHUR SMITH: Proud of our team and the resiliency, and just want to give a lot of the credit to Steve Wilks. That's a tough situation to be in. He's a hell of a coach, and I can't give Carolina enough credit. What he's done as interim, that's not easy. Didn't get a real long shot in Arizona especially. That guy is a hell of a football coach, and got to give Carolina and Steve Wilks a lot of credit.

Q. Arthur, what is that wild swing of emotions -- I know you're not an emotional guy, but what's that emotional toll like for you in the last like 15 minutes I guess real time?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, you just try to stay as even as possible. What's what you train yourself to do as a play caller, a head coach, and you try as best you can to stay neutral.

Only think I got upset, I let my emotions possible call, trying to take a chunk to get in field goal range. I didn't get a good look at it, but that was the only time I wasn't real happy with myself to show that emotion. You got to make a lot of decisions. There was a lot of things that came up. Do you take the penalty or the extra point, or do you try to take it because you're potentially down one, got 12 seconds, one time out? Do you take it for field position and see if you can get a chunk, use the timeout and let Koo win it there?

A lot of things going on, so you chose to move them back, you happen to miss it, take a shot. We didn't think -- kind of on the blocked it up to try to take one is see what would happen. Took it to overtime, took the ball, you know, tried to take another shot off a look we had seen and they played it well and they hit Marcus as he threw it. They got the ball back. Decided to freeze them.

I mean, there is a lot going on there and you got to stay even, because if you don't you're going to hurt the team. That's what I pride myself on is being neutral.

Q. The penalty that DJ Moore got, looked like you and Marquise were talking very briefly.

ARTHUR SMITH: We were.

Q. What was that discussion like in trying to...

ARTHUR SMITH: That situation there. I mean, that was one of those decisions you get paid to make. Whether you take the penalty there, move them back, which is a longer extra point, or -- because, again, if I makes it, if you don't take it, it's a one-point game and do you think your odds are better with 12 seconds and a time out to get a chunk and see if Koo could go win it.

You're weighing those, and then obviously we made the right call because it went our way. I'm sure you guys had a million stories you could have gone with. Good luck tonight. Probably had to delete a lot of different stories there.

Q. Yes, we did. Coach, just could you speak to the composure of the team as you all are going through those peaks and valleys in this game, in regulation and into overtime?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, that's what believed. I mean, we got a group of guys that it can -- it's never one side. We feel like we're a team and we all three phases, and we got guys that have stepped up. I'm very proud of them. I don't give a crap what the stats say. I'm proud of Cornell Armstrong and D Hall. Guys kept swinging. Get in the situation and it wasn't a true Hail Mary, so you're backed up trying to keep the ball in bounds and give DJ credit, because you're not in a true Hail Mary situation, so you're in a deep cover two, trying to keep inbounds because you're protecting a touchdown, and holy hell, he rolled out and launched it. That's what you're seeing, risk/reward. Three-man rush, pressure, four-man rush.

He made a hell of a throw, but that was the situation there. If we weren't in a pure Hail Mary they still had plenty of time. He was able to get the play extension and launched it.

Q. Can you speak to Marcus' play on the last drive? You talked about players stepping up. Talk about Damiere Byrd's play for you today.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, both those guys. Obviously the game, we came out, something we had been working on. Didn't start very great for us early on. Had the drop, took the shot, they picked it, came back and I thought played pretty damn good football. He's a resilient guy.

Same thing in overtime. Tried to take a shot, risk/reward. Obviously they played it better than we did. For him to come back, get the ball back in that play, that was -- that's why we believe in Marcus. Not many guys can make that play, and the moment is never too big for him.

Q. And Damiere Byrd's play?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, sorry. Demiere, another guy, been in our program. Guy that has been around the league. Just kept working, and Demiere is a guy we got a lot of faith in. He's proved himself the last two weeks. Caught the 75-yarder in Cincy and then today on that one. Marcus was able to extend that play.

And then really the finish and the effort on the guys not only when Demiere caught it, when he put his foot in the ground, the guys and the effort of the whole team there was pretty cool to watch.

Q. When you're in a game like this and seeing opposing teams miss field goals, extra points, and having Younghoe nail a 41-yarder to ultimately seal the win, how does that show the value of a guy not just like Younghoe, but to have a kicker that can go out and do that?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's really all three of those guys. Liam, and Bradley and Koo. Those are -- you hope you're never talking on extra point about your holder and snapper, so you got to give them credit. Bradley Pinion has been a hell of an acquisition for us, a guy that can go in there if you want to to kick touchbacks. I think he hit the goal post on one of them. I believe he hit the back of it. He's got a different club selections as a punter.

We are happy Bradley is on this team. He's a damn good holder, too.

And then Younghoe, like I said, we got all the faith in the world in Younghoe. That's why I called it on third down. Something happens, get back up, and we'll kick it again. Just happy for these guys and this team.

Q. I want to articulate this correctly. You always talk about being objective. Curious, in your mind, how do you weigh the game coming down to the wire and yes you do win, but you have opportunities down the stretch that it doesn't have to go that long; how do you weigh that in your mind?

ARTHUR SMITH: There is a lot of them, right? I mean, got a chance to end it, and I have to look at the tape. Thought we had a pretty good look at it. We ended up fourth and three and you're weighing, do you go for it.

Again, you're protecting a field goal. They got no timeouts. So make them go score a touchdown, right? You kick it there. I would have to look at that too. I thought we had them drawing offsides; obviously that's not the case.

You feel pretty good because it's really going to be check downs, but when he's able to extend that play, that was an unbelievable throw. He got behind us and -- but there is always things like that to correct. The way we started the game, that's a good defense, and we had a turnover early and they were playing the field position game. Always, always stuff to look at.

Q. Going back real quick to the question about Marcus. To go and have the interception late and then to put the drive together that you did to ultimately seal the win, can you walk me through the resilience that you see from Marcus in that moment specifically?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, guy that has been through a lot. Win the Heisman, you're a No. 2 pick, goes through a million staff changes in Tennessee. Going into a contract year gets benched. Can't say enough about how he handled that situation. Come back and he goes out to Vegas and sits and watches and didn't think he would ever get another opportunity.

It's a unique situation here. He's got such a calm demeanor and understands that you're never out of it. All of our guys believe that. You're never out of it. That was one of the craziest games I think I've ever been a part of. Happy to get the win any way we can, but I think I got a little grayer today.

Q. More specific on Marcus, his ability to navigate some tight pockets today and his decision making on when to get there and when to hang, what did you think about that?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, you got to pick a certain way to rush them. You can't just go up the middle. You turn your back to them too much he can hurt you, which happened in San Francisco when they pressured and essentially had

their back to them in a hybrid zone pressure. So the way they rush them sometimes they'll try to dent the pocket in, which allows you to get around it.

If you go around it and he steps up and he finds it, it's like pick your poison. The rush plans you're seeing on third down and the schemes, whether they pressure or how they rush the tackles, that allowed him to get out there.

Q. Any thoughts on being in the first place in NFC South?

ARTHUR SMITH: Just happy to get the win. Like I said, Monday or really tonight, got to look at the tape and we got to get on to the Chargers. It's hard to win in this league and we'll enjoy the win, but there is a lot of football left.

Q. You always talk about just kind of being even keeled. How do you get this team now back to that as quick as you can?

ARTHUR SMITH: There is a lot to learn from, right? It broke our way, and sometimes you need that to happen. So I mean, you hope you learned a lesson after the San Francisco game, and I think our guys have.

It's hard. It's a challenge every week. That's what we love about the NFL and I love coaching in it. It's the most competitive league in professional sports and every game is so important.

Q. When you called the timeout to ice Pineiro there, doesn't necessarily work a lot it seems like.

ARTHUR SMITH: Only thing you got left in your pocket. As I said, you go down with everything you got. It's like that's the only analogy I can give. Hadn't rung the bell yet, right, so one more punch. Last available tactic, and thankfully went our way.

Q. Did you actually think you would work?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah. Wouldn't have done it if I didn't.

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