

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Terry Fontenot

Weekday Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: We really appreciate Marcus and all the things he did while he was here. Personally, professionally, great man. We've had great communication with both he and his agent Ryan Tollner throughout the process, and we just believe we're doing what's best for the team at the time, but appreciate him and what he did when he was here.

Q. With him gone, how will you proceed in trying to restock the quarterback room?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, we're going to add to the position, and we've been really clear with how we feel about Desmond Ritter and what he's done to this point in his career, his makeup and just the way he's handle every role that he's been in, and what he did over the last four games of the season. He dealt with adversity, he got off the mat, he kept fighting. So Desmond has done some good things, and we know he's going to continue to improve this off-season, and we're going to continue to add to the position, whether it's free agency, the draft or both. We've talked about the quarterback position and how we want to make sure we continue to add to that position and we want to keep bringing players in.

Really excited about Desmond, and yet we're going to add to the position.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

TERRY FONTENOT: No updates right now, and we're going to -- we're working hard with some of those players, and some of them we're going to be able to bring back and get extensions done. Some will happen soon; some will take a little bit of time; some we won't be able to bring back.

We set parameters for ourselves, and we have to stay within those and have discipline, whether you're talking about players outside our building or inside our building.

No updates, but we're working through that.

Q. You mentioned Eric (indiscernible) goes into this year?

TERRY FONTENOT: We wouldn't do that. We wouldn't make any announcements like that, or we're not in the business of anointing players, but again, really excited about the things he's done, but we're going to add to the position.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

TERRY FONTENOT: I wouldn't say that. We're never going to put ourselves in a corner. We're always going to leave every door open. Again, draft, free agency, whether it's the eighth pick or whether it's at some other point in the draft, we could definitely bring in a quarterback. We don't want to box ourselves in and say something we're not going to do.

Q. (On bringing in a veteran or a younger player.)

TERRY FONTENOT: It could be both. It could be both. We want to bring in good players, so we could bring in a veteran, we could bring in a guy with experience, we could bring in a guy with no experience. We want to add to the room.

Q. You led a pair of record-setting (indiscernible). When you're trying to add (indiscernible) we have an identity, that's how we want to have our room?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, we want to bring in -- again, we're not going to box ourselves in and say we just want specific things. We have an identity, and we believe we do have a foundation. We've seen some good things in the building. The most thing, the thing we really want to focus on when we're bringing players in is making sure we're adding to the culture because we have a really strong culture and we do things a certain way. We have an identity, so we want to have cohesiveness with that. So we want to make sure we're bringing in more so than skill sets, the right types of players.

Q. Talk about discipline; we know you guys have the



cap space (indiscernible).

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, I would say it's a good question. Clearly we have a lot of cap space, and clearly we have a lot of flexibility. That was a part of the plan. This is the phase we're in. But we have to be cautious because we're not trying to get instant credibility or win a press conference or -- we want to make sure that we're bringing in the right types of players for our building, and that's going to -- we have a lot of work to do.

When you have a lot of cap space, there's a reason you have a lot of cap space; that means you have a lot of work to do. We have to add to every position, every phase, so we just want to make sure we have the right discipline, again, not just outside the building but inside the building, as well, and we're doing the right things. We have to set parameters because if we don't, we could get ourselves in a bind.

Yeah, we need to add a lot, and we just want to make sure we go through the process in the right way and focus on the right kind of people. We have to focus on our makeup and not compromise that at all.

Q. In your experience, what do you find is the biggest pitfall when it comes to scouting (indiscernible) so many mistakes get made?

TERRY FONTENOT: I think it's who they are because that's what's really going to set that ceiling, who they really are. That's why we're here at the combine, and every exposure matters. We get to meet with 45 players, 20 minutes a player, speed dating, but that's an important part of it. When these players play in the All-Star games, that's an important part of it. When we go for individual workouts, pro days, all these things, it all matters. It all matters.

So with quarterbacks or with any position, it's about who they are as individuals. They all have talent, and they all have good skill sets, but once they get in the NFL, there's a lot of other external pressures and a lot of things these young men have to deal with, so will they be able to handle that and get the most of themselves on the field. They're going to deal with adversity; how are they going to handle that. So you have to hit on the makeup and make sure you're bringing in the right types of individuals with the right intangibles.

Q. On intangibles, what do you need to see?

TERRY FONTENOT: Everything matters, and that's why we -- again, some people might not value the combine as much, but man, we want to be here and we want to be

here as much as we can and get full advantage of it because everything matters. Every moment you can be around these players and get around them or get around people that know them, everything matters.

You want to get as much exposure as you can and take advantage of every touchpoint.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, I think it's all important. I think it's all important. The most important thing I would say are the meetings. If you say what's the most important thing about the combine, it's the meetings. It's the medical we get; obviously our doctors and trainers are here. We get all the medical information. The time we get to spend with the players, that's important.

But I think the workouts are, too. Some players choose not to work out, and that's their prerogative, but you love for guys to get out there under the lights and go out there and compete.

We look at all the analytics and all the data, and it's apples to apples when you can compare it to 10 years ago what someone did at the same position and then we can look at the trends and look at what's most important at each position. We can do studies.

I think everything is important. If you say what's the most important thing, I would say the meetings.

Q. What have you seen out of Tyler the last year?

TERRY FONTENOT: Man, he's a good player. You always need multiple at that position. You're never going to -- I think having one running back just carry the ball all the time, I think that's kind of rare and unique for somebody. You need to have multiple running backs to preserve their career and to take care of them.

But man, we love Tyler. We love the work that he put in. He's such a smart, versatile player. He's a guy that can -- not just 1st and 2nd down but 3rd down, protection, he's smart, he can catch the ball. He can go play special teams on 4th down. So we love Tyler, but it's another position that we have to always add to.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, there's some good players from the Georgia Bulldogs here, but there's also a lot of good players from Georgia here, and that's something we lose sight of. We actually on our magnets where there's a free agent board or a college draft board, we put a peach



on there if they're from Georgia because that's something sometimes people lose sight of that there's a lot of players that grew up in this area that might have chose to go to another school. There's a lot of Georgia natives that are really talented. Yeah, the team, Georgia, is doing really well. They have some really good prospects here that we're excited about, but we're also excited about a lot of Georgia natives.

Q. Talk about evaluating trends (indiscernible) slot corner/inside outside corner or the safety slot guy, how much are you looking at the players (indiscernible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, good question because that's a starter. Now, if you look at -- you're in your sub 75 to 80 percent of the time, you're going to be in that sub package, so that position, that whatever you call it, nickel, star, third safety, third corner, that's a starting position, and it's a tough position because you obviously have to be really smart because you have to do a lot of different things. You've got to play the run. You've got to pressure. There's so many different things that you need to do. But that's a critical position.

Q. (Indiscernible). What are some of the traits that you guys look for?

TERRY FONTENOT: In pass rushers? Well, when we talk about pass rush, it's not just about the defensive line or the D-tackles or the defensive ends. You want to add everywhere, because it doesn't matter how quick you're getting to the quarterback. If the coverage isn't good, then it doesn't matter. They can get rid of the ball quick. So you have to make sure you build up your defense and improve your defense.

In pass rushers it doesn't matter how you get to the quarterback. It can be with power, it can be with quickness. There's different ways to do it, so you want versatile players, but you have to make sure you're improving your whole defense, and you're not just focusing on one area because it's a total picture.

Q. (Indiscernible) is it like a sit-down interview?

TERRY FONTENOT: So what we do, we have February meetings, and that's just the scouts, so that's Kyle Smith and the scouts going through and setting the board. We have an excellent scouting staff that has done a really good job through the season, and they've set the board based off the information they have now, and that's what's, again, so important about this part of the process, because now this is the coaches' first exposure. So we get to have 45 formal interviews and then we have a lot of informal

interviews, and we have all the information from the scouts, now they get to get in front of them.

So we're going to continue to go through. We'll have the pro days, we'll have the private visit, private workouts and we'll continue to go through it, and then we'll get to April and it's going to change because we have more information.

We're in a critical part of the process right now. We do, we set the board, and that's the fun part because you're setting it just based off the film and what you got from the school. So that's really cool.

Now we get through the rest of the process and get the coaches involved, and then we make the adjustments.

Q. Given Nielsen's history developing (indiscernible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, it's really fun, and Nielsen, when I think about a guy like him, I think about what we have in our culture and our types of coaches, and it's all about development and competitiveness. We always talk about our culture, development and competitiveness, and that's who Ryan Nielsen is. The same things that we preach, the same things we've been talking about for the last two years, those are the things he's all about, and you'll see him on the practice field. That's his favorite part. He loves to get out there and work the guys, and he loves for the guys to go out and compete, and it doesn't matter how he got there. It doesn't matter if you're a top draft pick, a high-paid free agent, or if you're an undrafted guy. It doesn't matter how you got there; if you're willing to come in and put in the work every day, then you're going to have an opportunity.

Love Ryan. He's what we're all about, and we're going to definitely have a lot of competition. We're going to definitely develop players here.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

TERRY FONTENOT: Talking about in the draft? Well, right in the midst of that right now so I wouldn't talk about a specific, but man, you can find players everywhere. We always talk about it, there's going to be a really good player at 8, or whether we move up or move down, we're going to get a good player in the first round, and then throughout the draft, we have an excellent staff that we're going to find those players.

Every year we get through the draft, there's guys that didn't even get signed as an undrafted free agent, they show up at a rookie camp and make a team. We're going to turn over every stone. Again, we have an excellent staff, and



we're going to challenge ourselves to find players at every level.

Q. (Indiscernible).

TERRY FONTENOT: Oh, that's a really -- I appreciate that question because we really value the Senior Bowl. We have 20 players on our roster right now from the Senior Bowl, and 11 of those players are from the last two draft classes. Jim Nagy and that staff, they do a really good job bringing in players. The process is always really smooth, and they give really good access to the scouts and the coaches, so really valuable experience for us, so we appreciate it.

Q. (Indiscernible).

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, that's another good question. We really have to eliminate the noise. We always talk about focusing on the process and eliminating the noise, because there is, there's so much stuff out there right now. There's a lot of different information out there.

We have to focus on the process and focus on the things that are most important, and it's not always easy because there is a lot of information, but that's why, again, things like this, things like the pro days, things like the visits, we really focus on those areas, and those are really important for us.

Q. (Indiscernible.)

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, at every position. We go through and we do studies every year, and we look at the trends of what's most important, whether we're talking about a specific measurable, a specific statistic, but that's ever changing, ever evolving. It's something we want to constantly look at. As much information as we can get, we want to get it, and then we just need to decipher it and figure out what's most important.

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