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Terry Fontenot

Arthur Smith

Draft Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: Real excited about tonight. Bijan, we hold him in high regard on the field, off the field. We talk about positionless football, and the impact that he is going to make for us, we're extremely excited to get Bijan today.

Q. Could you all discuss his versatility, Terry, and then, Coach, can you give us more insight into that Austin workout he gave us a little bit about today.

ARTHUR SMITH: We did a lot of work with guys that we thought would be in that pod we were picking when we moved up or back a few spots. We went down to Austin and were able to work Bijan out. Took him to dinner the night before. Worked him out. Felt really good about. No different than we did with Drake the year before.

And some of the things that we were going to ask him to do, you see it on the tape, with the background, not just the running back, the running back stuff was obvious on the tape, but the versatility part where you use him and where he has been effective, I mean, he did that at Texas at times, but his background, playing in the slot, was another big piece of it. That's intriguing.

We feel he is an explosive weapon, a home run hitter however he gets the football in his hands.

Q. Jalen Carter was available. What was your decision-making process to go with the running back over the tackle there?

ARTHUR SMITH: A lot of good players available. You can't coach them all. You make the decisions. We collaborate, and there's a lot of thought that goes into it. We do what we think is best for our team. There's a lot of good players. It's not about one guy.

I understand the question and the intent of the question, because he is a player that was successful at Georgia, and

they've had a lot of success the last two years. There are a lot of good players there.

Q. As far as you mentioned Bijan and what he is able to do, you've tried to with Cordarrelle kind of move him all over the place. Is that a similar vision that you would have for Bijan?

ARTHUR SMITH: You get in there, and you have a vision, but with a young player, you want to bring them along and make sure he is successful early.

Him and CP are different football players. I know you are talking about -- they are unique where you can line them up, but their skill sets are different, so they're not the same player.

We didn't take Bijan thinking he is CP. They do have a lot of versatility. No different than Kyle does. Kyle can play in the corner or the slot or play outside, and then Jannu too. Jannu can play a lot of different places as well.

Just another explosive player that we can add to our offense. We're really fired up that we were able to get him at eight.

Q. Throughout since you have been here, you've tried to find players that can be in multiple spots, whether it's Kyle, whether it's Drake who can be inside or outside. What does that do offensively for you guys now that it seems like every player you have, except for maybe Tyler, can do that?

ARTHUR SMITH: It allows you a lot of flexibility. You can get unique with your personnel packages. You can line up where it looks like 22 personnel, you can line up where it looks like 10 personnel, 11, get in the empty.

It allows you to put a lot of stress even just presnap logistically as you are going on to the field, you know, the way we operate and play. And we'll evolve. There's not -- because we did something last year, if you look at our passing number from '21 to last year, I mean, you're going to see them more balanced this year. The way we want to play and how we want to evolve as an offense as well.

So Bijan, you know, obviously he can carry the football. That's obvious. But the other way you can find ways to get guys touches, whether first, second down, whether you're talking about the screen games, talking about some of the intermediate stuff. So we feel really good where we're at skill-wise.

Q. Terry, just for you, there were some pretty high-level defensive players on the board --

TERRY FONTENOT: Yes.

Q. -- along with Bijan. What was it that you saw out of Bijan that made you want to go to the offensive side of the ball, which is maybe one of the higher-end defensive players?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, there were other good offensive players on the board too, but we look at the impact that he is going to make on offense. Again, we're not living in a box and saying that, hey, we can only take this position or that position. We're not going to reach if we don't feel good about things.

So the total picture of it, we really like what he is going to bring to the offense. We really like the impact that he is going to make on offense.

And this is a good draft. There are some other good players on the board. A lot of other positions. We're excited about tomorrow. We're going to bring in some good players, whether this next pick for us could be another offensive player, could be a defensive player, but it's going to be a player that's going to make an impact.

Q. The three years that Bijan was with Texas, he was incredibly durable. Only missed a couple of games. When you talk to him and also coaches at Texas, what about his prep kind of helped him in that regard?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, just I think everything about him, he really is, he is a really mature young man. The ways he works, whether it's prehab or the way he takes care of his body, he is already -- it's kind of unique because most of these players, they're young, so they're going to be a little immature. But he is already a true professional.

I'm sure you guys got to spend some time with him today already, and you can see who he really is as a person and the professional he is. We get excited about that. We get excited about when you put on the tape, and when you put on the tape, he is usually the best player on the field out there. He has been like that for a long time in his life.

And then whenever you meet the person and put the total picture together -- we like to bring in guys that are going to make people around them better as well, and he is. He is going to come in, and the competitor he is, the person he is, we're really excited.

Q. What's a moment or maybe a story from when you guys visited him or at some other point during the predraft process that you thought, man, this is exactly the kind of guy that we're looking for?

ARTHUR SMITH: Like we talked about the other day, like every interaction we have with the players matter. Another cool part about it when we went down to Austin is TQ showed up at the workout, a guy that had been his teammate, you could see their interactions and how much -- how close they were as friends.

Even TQ went with us to that barbecue place and got the biggest rib I've ever seen. I'm from Memphis, and I've seen a lot of good barbecue, and we were at Terry Black's place down there. This thing looked like a dinosaur rib. TQ hammered that one away.

Just those interactions. I mean, it's real. It's genuine. It's not one of these phony, hey, I'm made for Instagram, or whatever social media, I'm going to look good, and then the guys is a complete fraud. This guy is authentic, and he is real, and he has a unique story.

Q. We talked earlier in the week about how you can't ignore all the mock drafts out there, and so, of course, you saw that a lot of people were connecting you guys to Bijan. A lot of those speculations included the possibility that because of the way other teams view running backs right now there might have been an opportunity for you to move back and still get the guy you want. Was that ever on the thought process?

TERRY FONTENOT: You definitely weigh it. You definitely weigh when you are on the clock. You communicate with teams. And really I say on the clock, even leading up to it. You communicate with teams and see what the price would be to move back, what you could get, what you could pick up to move back.

Then you have to weigh it and say, okay, if we're going to pick up this draft pick or make this pick swap and move back this many spots and these are the players we're going to be looking at because this could happen, you just have to weigh it out, and we did. That's our job to -- that's a part of the process to really weigh it out.

Same thing we'll do tomorrow. Whether we're going to move up or move back, it's all a weighing process. You

want to do that, but when you feel good about the player and you want to take the player, and you say, okay, if we move back a few spots and we lose him, if you feel good about it and you have conviction, and we have really strong conviction on him, so we didn't want to risk anything.

ARTHUR SMITH: Follow that up too. One of the things that are just pretty obvious when you are talking about weighing risk, certainly we had opportunities as Terry -- I mean, they were working the phones. You do take that risk.

I think what you are talking about, conventional wisdom, he is a lot more than a running back. He's an impact football player. He's a home run hitter.

The other part is you can see the corresponding moves like last year. When you are weighing taking a receiver early, we thought there was going to be a run on receivers. A lot of good players. If we go to every position, we may not get any receiver in the second round.

Well, I think you saw a couple of picks later, the corresponding move. Kind of that's the best answer I can give you. There's cause and effect there.

Certainly we're not in any other team's draft rooms, but things become pretty obvious.

Q. Do you think you approach the draft different than any other teams with the concept of convention in terms of how --

ARTHUR SMITH: Are we disrupters?

Q. I'm not using that word. Do you feel like you all --

ARTHUR SMITH: That's a word you would probably use, right? Especially this late at night, something interesting.

TERRY FONTENOT: Gluten-free snacks over there.

Q. You took Kyle at four two years ago. Tight end is a position that conventionally doesn't get taken. You do have Bijan this year. Is there something of maybe how you all approach this draft process different than other teams?

ARTHUR SMITH: When you answer those, it's like you're sitting there trying to pat yourself on the back like we've done something. We have our beliefs and the way we operate, but that's a lot of moves. Look at the other moves we have made, Mike. Not just the draft. You are trying to find value where you can.

I think we tried to be creative. Certainly the first few years, certain things we tried to work around to give us a chance to win and build the right culture around here.

So, yeah, I think there's a lot -- like I always think about this business, there's so much paranoia and insecurity and people want to crowdsource things and go with group think to be safe so they feel good right now.

You know, if you -- we'll see. We'll find out. We feel pretty damn good about where we're at.

TERRY FONTENOT: We really believe in our staff, whether we're talking about the front office, the coaches. We believe in our building. We believe in our process. When we take players off the board, we love those players, and we have a lot of conviction, again, about the players and the people that we're bringing in the building with what we're trying to build here. It's all important, and so we feel real good about the guys.

You have to block out the noise and not care if it's conventional or what different people say you should or shouldn't do. You have to block out the noise and really believe in your building and your process, and we're really excited.

Q. Terry, I think last year you said before the draft your son had already gotten the Drake London jersey. Was this another moment like that where you guys kind of circled Bijan before the draft, or was this kind of how it fell out?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, we got excited about him, right, and we got excited about the player. We didn't buy Kaiden a Bijan jersey. He is getting to a point where I'm starting to worry about him a little bit because he wants to get a lot of information, wants to talk about stuff. He really loves this.

But we had talked about something during free agency. I told him we were going to try to sign a particular player. So he keeps texting me and asking me, Hey, Dad, did you all do it yet? He said, Let me know when you do. I got something prepared. I was, like, Whoa, buddy. It's almost like he was going to tweet something out or a picture. I said, No, you are not breaking news. He is trying to get his followers up.

So, no, we didn't buy him a Bijan jersey because I just don't know if he is going to wear it to school or something. But there comes a point in the process where you fall in love with a player or players and it just depends on how it falls. We're excited about Bijan, but we needed to go through the process of the draft. And the way it fell out,

we're real excited.

Q. To follow up on that, you said there comes a point in the process when you fall in love with the player. When did you all fall in love with Bijan?

TERRY FONTENOT: It was kind of I would say one point, but it's kind of everything together, right? You look at the boots on the ground, area scouts when they're evaluating the players. Years ago, early in their careers, they're evaluating them, and they have real strong grades on them on and off the field and the area scouts love them. They love the player.

Then every step of the way all the way down to the workout, you get workout, and you see him in person and what he is doing. It's every part of the process. You look all the way back to the very beginning, to that first area scout that put a grade on him, and you loved him and graded him in the place that he did. I think it's really the total picture.

Q. What kind of a reference does Sarkisian give for Bijan?

ARTHUR SMITH: A great one. I didn't really know Steve before. Obviously, we have a lot of mutual friends. You cross paths with a lot of people, but that was another part of that visit, getting to spend time with him. You know, again, everybody -- as you're filtering through, I've had plenty of other coaches, they sell you, and that's their job to. They may leave out some things that you find out later, like, eh, I wish I would have known that. That's not the case with Bijan and anything Sark told us.

It wasn't just about the player too. It was about the impact he had in the locker room, the leadership that he had.

TERRY FONTENOT: We really appreciate him too. We try to go on a lot of these visits, and we did with other players as well, and just how welcoming they were in that facility.

Best thing is right when you walk in, there's a picture of Jerry Gray. What would you call that hairdo?

ARTHUR SMITH: I'll send out the picture.

TERRY FONTENOT: It's one of these old-school hairdos. They're very welcoming and allow us full access and let us do everything. That's pretty cool because they've got a job to do. They're in spring ball.

But for him to allow us to go there you and spend all the time we did with him, and they're wide open with

everything, that means a lot.

Q. There's a young group of skill players here that are going to be under contract for a long time with Des and Kyle and Tyler and Drake and now Robinson. Is there something to be said, not only for bringing in this talent, but this talent is going to play together for a long time, to kind of build that?

ARTHUR SMITH: You go back and look at what Jimmie Johnson did with Dallas, they did it a little bit different, the game was played a little bit different back then. It's still football. The line of scrimmage. Just a good young core.

When they added those guys, and that's not the only example, but that's probably a good reference point as well. It certainly helps when you are -- when there's consistency even with the staff when you're not constantly learning new languages every spring. That helps. Certainly helps. Especially when we're going to ask guys to play as many roles as we do, and we'll bring Bijan along the right way too.

Speaking of Tyler, Tyler is a very important part of this offense. They're different players. You talk about how different and unique. You can look a lot at advanced metrics on the surface. You are like, hey, both of them are yards after contact players, but how they do that, they're different, completely different.

Tyler is like -- you know, when you watch the game go on, it's like probably -- it's like somebody that's got a sledgehammer that's bludgeoning through their line of scrimmage as the game goes on and wears you down. Where Bijan, his contact balance, the way he doesn't go down and the way he is able to get explosives off that, they're just different, the way that people will have to tackle them. They're different players.

If you look at that metric, they are both yards after contact. They both play running back. Similar to Jannu and Kyle. They're listed as tight ends, but they're completely different players.

Q. I can remember a time or two last season when we discussed the committee approach at running back, and you said you have a different philosophy based upon the players you have. And, of course, the Derrick Henry comparison comes out. Can this guy be that kind of guy who can take that kind of --

ARTHUR SMITH: No, I have never asked somebody to be. That's ridiculous. Derrick Henry is a gold-jacket player. Derrick Henry is one of the most unique players I've ever been privileged to coach.

If you really want to look at it and get in depth, the way we ran the ball in '20 in Tennessee is completely different than how we ran it '20. Pretty similar in success. Excuse me, in '22. Sorry. There I go. That's my first mental error of late at night.

TERRY FONTENOT: He had a --

ARTHUR SMITH: He has his stuff going.

TERRY FONTENOT: Be careful what you say, man. He is on it.

ARTHUR SMITH: You look at the run game of Charles in '20 and the way we ran the football in Tennessee and the way we ran it last year, we didn't run that kind of zone. That's what I'm saying. On the surface everybody is, like, oh, running the football. Derrick, unique. We're not asking Tyler and would never ask a player to be something like that.

The way we ran it last year in '22, very similar results as we had in '20 in Tennessee. Completely different run game. We were pistol. We were zone read. We did all kind of different things. Surface narrative, oh, yeah, that's not what we did. It's not what we did in '21. We know what we need to get to and what we're playing to achieve here.

But that's -- so Tyler and Bijan and Caleb Huntley or CP, whoever is here, whoever is up on game day, they'll all have unique roles, but nobody will be Derrick Henry. I can promise you that.

Q. The play caller and someone who I know you like to drop the Xs and Os and things, how excited does this make you? I know you talked about his versatility, but just to be able to kind of flex him out from a slot receiver that moved him into the back field potentially, does that just open up the offense?

ARTHUR SMITH: After the season coaches get into the scouting process. These guys have done so much work. It's what I appreciate about our scouts. It's my job too. We all have our opinions on the players, but then you get a group of guys, and these guys in the pot, even defensively, I've got -- we have a great staff, and we collaborate on this, and we have a creative staff, and guys that are problem solvers.

It's, like, if we take player A, how do we make this guy successful? The easiest thing to do if you get down here is just to knock these guys, what they can't do, this or that. I start making cut-ups of, all right, we get player A. What's the vision? Where I think is he really strong. How does he

fit us and where we push the limits to --

So with a guy like Bijan, I did the same thing with Kyle, Drake, or anybody we've taken, Tyler, anybody we have invested in, certainly early. Same thing on the defensive side.

What's their role? We did it with the free agents. Go back and watch Bud Dupree. Here's what he did in Pittsburgh. Here's what he did in Tennessee. A little bit different scheme. Here's what's always been his strengths. How would he fit us.

Calais, no different. He has played on the defensive line. Calais came in here, here's what the vision was. I talked to Ryan, Ryan talks to him, here's how we play guys. Same thing.

We try to make sure anybody we bring in here, certainly that we invest in like that, that here's the vision for this player. And like an offense guy like Bijan, how creative can we be?

Q. When did you all sense just looking at the way things unfolded with the quarterbacks at one, two, and four -- when did you all sense he might get through to you?

TERRY FONTENOT: You never know until you're on the clock. You never know until you're on the clock, and we were trying to -- you know, you talk to everybody. We have those conversations about moving back and moving up, and we talked to everybody, but, man, you really never know until you're on the clock.

Q. Two trades in front of you too.

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yep.

ARTHUR SMITH: Somebody brought it up too. You know, like, how much people lie in this thing. It's so competitive. You sit back, and you look at it. Terry said it the other day, and he was right, it was so unpredictable. The last two years I think we were pretty confident, give or take. This one was chaos, other than one. I think that was the worst kept secret for the last couple of weeks.

But you get down two and beyond, even people that you potentially had trade, nobody is going to tell you who they're taking, but the way they try to put all this misinformation, that's not what really happened. It was. Just thankful he was there.

Q. Were there offers that you were seriously entertaining?

TERRY FONTENOT: We discussed, again, leading up to the pick, and we even discussed some things when you are on the clock, but you just have to weigh it out. You have to look at what you are really getting and does it make sense because you don't know if you move back three spots if someone else is taking the player or someone else can jump and take a player.

You just really don't know. So you have to weigh it out and say, okay, when you look at your stack of players, if we go back three spots, are we going to be good with this player and this additional pick that we're getting? Is that really worth it?

That's what I love about our staff. When we are convicted and we love players and we want them, and you still have those discussions, but the same thing, there are some players we're really excited about that are going to be on the board tomorrow. That's what you are looking for, conviction and passion.

You love these guys, and you talk about the young core. That is exciting because y'all have met all these guys. They're good. You want your kids wearing these jerseys. You want to buy your kid a Bijan jersey or a Drake jersey. You want to buy your kids these jerseys.

ARTHUR SMITH: Don't forget the O-line because -- he gets Kaiden the skill guys. I'm getting Big Liam a Lindstrom jersey or Jake.

TERRY FONTENOT: Kaiden has a Koo jersey too.

ARTHUR SMITH: Or Onyemata or Guidry.

TERRY FONTENOT: But you really do. You get excited about these players and the guys because of the type of people they are too.

They're going to reach their ceilings because of who they are and the passion. And you keep bringing those kind of guys in, and we're really building something special, and we are excited.

Q. Does this change how you either use Cordarrelle or in some way Cordarrelle's status I guess on the roster?

ARTHUR SMITH: You want to evolve. CP took on a different role in '21. Then last year he carried the ball a lot more early in '22.

We're excited about guys we have on this roster. It's my job to get the most out of whoever is up and healthy on game day and do everything we can to win those games. As you look at it, some of it's a numbers game too.

You know, you are talking about targets and carries and the way you are trying to get the football and spread it around. Like I said, you would like to get to the point where you balance. I don't think you'll ever get to it.

If you did have 1,100 snaps and you're going to go 5-55-50 because some games you are hoping to be in more four-minute, but we want to be more balanced in how we get there.

And that's a good problem to have, but we have to make sure the way you target guys, again, you may call a play. It may be going to Drake. They roll the cover and double him. We have other weapons that can open things up. So you want to pick your poison.

So we feel good. We're moving in that direction.

Q. Given the level of uncertainty heading into this draft, and you see these trades, and you're not sure if Bijan is going to be there at eight, what happens? Does emotion creep in? What's going through your head when you are on the clock, he is there?

TERRY FONTENOT: So you're patient; right? Air time; right? You take a little time. You wait and answer calls, and have you that communication.

You have to cover your bases. Again, that's our job. That's our job to work to get the right value in all those years, so you answer the calls, and you take your time. But, man, we're excited.

We kind of had a feeling what Vegas was going to do, you know, in front of us. But still, you're waiting. Once you get on the clock, you are excited, but you have to take your time and go through the process, but we're pumped.

Q. You mentioned earlier about how to conviction in these picks and not succumbing to the group think. I read one review from the draft, and there were two Ds given out, and they were to the two running backs that were selected. How do you find that conviction? I know there's probably some stats where you are saying, okay, we don't want to draft certain players that have these combine metrics because it's historically a poor decision. How do you find that --

TERRY FONTENOT: When you go through and you look at the history, and that's what we do, and it really helps.

When we look at the history and look at grades on draft grades or free agent grades or coaches hires and you look at the way critics are saying, a lot of times it's wrong.

Look, in the moment it can be something as simple as they had something different in their mock draft, and it's fantasy football to whoever the publications are. But when you go back and look at the history, it is freeing because you see that, okay, those instant analysis aren't always right.

Sometimes the total other way. When you talk about players that are taken and how good the picks were and how good the signings were, and sometimes those are way off too.

So when you look at that stuff, then you just want to block it out. Again, our staff does a really good job of that. Blocking that out and let's do what's right for us and do what's right for our team.

Q. Bijan said he felt like the running back position is undervalued a little bit. There were a couple of taken first round. Do you all feel like the way the league approaches the running back position in terms of the draft, he is accurate there, undervalued?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's a personal opinion. I think he is a valuable football player. The impact you can have on your team, that's the value. The value, the impact he makes, does he help you win games?

I mean, there are a lot of guys that can stuff the stat sheet. You can have a lot of receptions, and you are playing a lot of two-minute and getting your teeth kicked in. You can have a great year. You can have 90-something catches and feel really great, but what was your impact on winning?

So I think a guy like Bijan, I mean, his impact. Same thing like Kyle. Kyle had statistically a great year his rookie year. Then this year -- been ad nauseam about that too, but Kyle's impact on winning, we felt it when Kyle wasn't in there, I promise you that. We were trying to problem-solve or whatever, but that stuff is real.

Obviously, you would like to get to the point where you're rolling offensively and where everybody is -- when you really get to that point, certainly, but you have to have the right mindset.

The impact he will have on winning, that's the same thing defensively. I remember guys that just pushed the pocket, and they open up things. We've seen guys get paid because they're around a great player that's an interior pressure player. The guy has one good year, and he gets paid. You never hear from him again.

But the guy that pushes the pocket, he may never show up on that stat sheet. You may have some guru that maybe actually can watch it and see, hey, this guy has a pressure thing, but then they may just say, oh, well, he doesn't have any sacks or quarterback hits.

But he was the guy, like the RBI guy. It's no different than sometimes on a route certain coverages, they're at the right depth. All that stuff matters. They have those extra things. That's another underrated thing Drake did. A lot of other explosive runs, you see the guy that's down the field, usually No. 5. He didn't have 15 catches and 300 yards, but the guy was able to help us win in different ways. Then he did have an impact.

So his impact is six catches for 80. Maybe he has a touchdown. But the impact he had down the field and created kept us out of -- kept drives going, set up maybe explosive play later. Those are things that don't show up, but when you have a vision --

So I'll get off my soapbox here, but the impact he has on winning is what we're really fired up about.

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