

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Arthur Smith Terry Fontenot Draft Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: Hi, guys. Excited about the two players we got in this round. DeMarcco, versatile player. Safety, but he can play down, he can play deep. Productive player. He is smart. Special teams. Again, stick with the theme of the draft.

Then you get to the next pick, Jovaughn. Same thing, versatile interior player. Smart, tough, highly competitive.

Man, from the first pick eighth overall to the eighth pick in the seventh round, that's been the theme. We got smart, tough, highly competitive players that fit what we're about, they fit our makeup, and they're versatile, smart football players.

So very excited about the outcome of this draft. We kind of said it at the outset. There's a lot of people that work really hard through this process. It takes the entire building to do this, and there's a lot of hours that go into it.

And we're still working on it right now. We're working on the free agency process. We can start when the draft ends. We'll start working on the free agency process and get our plan and start making those calls, but it's very exciting to be able to wrap up a draft class like this and then get into the free agents.

Questions.

Q. Yeah, the productivity of both of the seventh rounders, DeMarcco leading tackler over there and Jovaughn, 47 starts. Did that give you all a good kind of reference point to dig into their potential?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Like you say, if you are that productive as a safety, obviously, tough, smart, so that means something. Like you say, to start that many games, then you have to be a pretty tough, versatile guy. Yeah, that definitely means something to us, the production. It.

ARTHUR SMITH: D-line means something too. They were highly productive players in the SEC. Both of them played in a lot of big-time games and big-time environments, and they show up week in and week out, so we're very excited to add both of them to the program.

Q. This is going to be a weird question, but after it was your first pick or second pick in the seventh round, they showed your war room, and it looked like you were just telling a story or something. A Falcons fan or maybe they gave you a punter, or I don't know.

ARTHUR SMITH: Maybe I was messing with Olson about something, so made a reference that he is the office Toby, but...

Q. (Off microphone).

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, absolutely. Charles got to spend some time with Jovaughn when I went to the South Carolina clinic.

Knew a lot about him. Tried to recruit him at NC State and whiffed, but we got him this time. In all seriousness, he was a productive guy. You could feel it. He was a leader of that building, leader of that line. There's nothing fake about him. Obviously, a little undersized, but when you talk about a guy that consistently finished over and over and over again. Not just in the big games when they're up. When you are looking at them and they're down, how are they playing in the fourth quarter, that's a guy that you know exactly what you are bringing into this building, and we'll see how it works out.

He played at guard. We think he can play some center. Again, just no different than when we drafted Matt. We feel good about the depth and where we're at with the O-line, but we know if you are not constantly building that, a run on bad luck, you want to be able to develop guys and guys that have been in your program.

So if you have to play and, like we talked about, the competitive nature of our camp, certainly Jovaughn will bring that to the interior offensive line room.

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Q. I thought it was interesting, that full circle moment you were talking about with Led and Jovaughn. When you get into the seventh round, how much are you relying on those relationships that maybe have already previously been established with either assistants or area scouts, with guys who maybe you don't know as much about as you do in the first or second round?

ARTHUR SMITH: You know, speaking from a coaching standpoint, I mean, it's part, but it's not -- there's plenty of guys we don't have that with, but you feel good about it because it's just one more confirmation of what we've already -- everybody has been told. There's a lot of guys that go to that school. When you are talking about the SEC, I mean, everybody hits them with their scouts, the regional scouts, people going there. You get a lot of looks at them.

It just confirms what everybody has been told, what they've seen, you know, their interactions with him. It helps. Now you're going back into the high school makeup of him, and you see the long body of work and the consistency of the player and the person, so certainly gives you a lot of confidence of the type of person and player you're bringing in the building.

Q. Following on that, there are a couple of guys that you took that were incredibly highly rated high school prospects that maybe didn't have the college production that would have correlated theoretically. How much do you go back to that and saying, hey --

ARTHUR SMITH: In what regard? You are talking about -- that's one of the hardest -- it's hard enough to play college football, but to get drafted to the National Football League, now you're just -- the comparison, you're talking about relative here, like -- I'm kind of confused the angle you're going at.

Q. I was just getting at sometimes with high school guys it's traits as well that maybe it doesn't work out for one reason or another. I'm just wondering if that plays into it at all when you are looking at it if the talent was really, really there in high school and just with the production correlation?

ARTHUR SMITH: Again, you guys have covered this a long time. Terry has his own experiences too. There's some guys that -- these guys were productive. They played at a high level in a lot of football games, but I've been a part of places that have taken flyers post-draft on a guy that may have been a big recruit and didn't really get on the field in college for whatever reason, and they want to kick the tires, but these guys -- all these guys, whether

you're a five star recruit, three star recruit, they found a way to play at some of the top programs in the country. So I would not certainly knock that.

It's all about perspective, Mike, I think sometimes. You know, when you have these tags and if it doesn't go the way right away, you're more encouraged when they fight through it, so I look at that as a positive in certain aspects. There are a lot of ways to look at it.

Q. Talking a lot about the guys that the Falcons have drafted in the last three days, but do you maybe take a step farther back and see the players that you've acquired with these draft assets? I'm talking about Jeff, and I'm talking about Jonnu. Guys that you were able to use draft capital to add. Do you kind of include them into this kind of player haul, and do you look at it maybe that way to say, hey, we could have had this fifth round pick, but we have Jeff that's part of this player haul from what you had scheduled?

TERRY FONTENOT: You know, all the draft picks are assets. Okay, we can figure out a way to -- whether we're using a pick to go up and get a player or move them back, you know.

So they're all assets. We kind of look at it even with guys like that, like with Jeff Okudah or Jonnu. It's going to take a draft pick and somebody to go get them. It's more about that. You weigh it. Okay, if you are using this draft pick, you won't be able to draft a player there, but it's just literally when we really like players, no different than there are some players that we had to move around for some players we were patient with, but when we have passion and conviction, whether we're talking about a free agent, whether we're talking about a draft pick, you have to be disciplined. We just really want to go get them.

So we just look at it like they're assets to try to get the right results that we want.

Q. Everyone says that they want toughness and physicality, but from Bijan to these guys just now, those are pretty evident traits in these guys, right? How big of a priority is that?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's pretty simple. Say what you say and say what you mean. Have the discipline to do it. People tell you a lot of things. We're not perfect. We don't think we're anything special, but one thing I know about Terry and myself and the type of staff we have, you know, I guess when we say we want to do something, you want to execute it. You start making exceptions over and over again, and then you don't really stand for anything. So...

TERRY FONTENOT: You have to -- like Arthur said, you're right, everybody says it, right? But when you have the discipline to really do it, and when we err, we're going to err on that side. When we're looking at a couple of players, and you have a player that's highly talented, but he doesn't fit the makeup that we're looking for, and you have this player that may not have the same talent, but he fits everything we're about, we're going to err on the side of taking that player that fits that.

Like I said, right now we're going through the process of preparing to get ready to jump into the undrafted free agency process. Me and Arthur have to hurry up and get back in there so we can make sure as we're stacking because you go through and you say, okay, now we're setting another board and stacking. Okay, we're going to go after these particular players, and this is the order we're going to go after them in, but we're going to go through the same process with that. I don't care if it's an undrafted free agent. We don't care if we're just working a player out. It's all relative, right?

We talk through it. Okay, hey, there were some issues here, and let's talk through it, or this player was injured at this time. So you see something different. We have to believe in the character and the football makeup and the personal makeup. We have to believe in those things to bring players into this program. Whether we're talking about players you draft, players we signed, undrafted free agents, players we work out, we want to have the discipline to stick to that.

Q. At what point do you guys start working on the (indiscernible) board --

ARTHUR SMITH: This is ridiculous. Come on, dude. We don't -- you can't do that until after the draft.

TERRY FONTENOT: You said the board, though. Yeah.

ARTHUR SMITH: Okay. I thought you were trying -- okay. Something I was wondering if there's a difference because of...

TERRY FONTENOT: What we do with the board --

Q. We're all tired.

TERRY FONTENOT: But with the board, that's something that we start early on and once we get through, okay, we have the players we expect to be on the front board. We have a front board; right? We have the players we expect to be on there.

But then you also have a back board, players you don't

expect to get drafted. Again, from the scouts and the coaches do a really good job, so they're grinding film on a lot of these guys you don't expect to get drafted. Some of them go. Some of them don't. We already have a good feel for it. Once we get through the front board meetings, that's what the coaches and scouts are grinding on these guys, just back-to-back, watching all these players that you don't expect to go, for whatever reason.

Some of them get drafted. Some of them don't. Again, as players are going off, you're continuing to move around and set that board.

Q. Now that most of the roster -- offseason roster additions are done, do you all feel differently -- "expectations" is kind of a weighted word, but do you feel differently about where you were than at this stage of the process two years ago and what kind of team you've got and what's possible?

ARTHUR SMITH: Just different years. I know what you are asking, but every year is different; right? They're different set of circumstances and different set of obstacles. We said it. Terry said it right after the season. I've said it whenever you've asked. It's different.

I know what you are saying. Oh, these great expectations. I mean, our expectations are to win. I mean, we're trying to every year. We've never made excuses, and whatever the hand you're dealt, you --

Q. Do you feel better equipped now?

ARTHUR SMITH: Certainly we changed our strategy in free agency. You know, we had money to work with and how we went about it. There will be things that come up. There will be students. Maybe somebody proposes a trade that can improve our team and maybe we couldn't have done that a year ago because of maybe a salary cap constraint or something like that.

But everybody sets out. We start training camp, and we're trying to do everything we can to win every football game that we're a part of. Certainly you talk about expectations. Our expectations every year are to go out there. Talk about small starts, things you can control to get into the postseason, win your division. You can get in there other ways in a wild card, but that will be our expectation.

You are talking about sustaining success. Let's get in the playoffs every year and get in the dance, try to make a run. I would think that's what every other team is trying to do.

Understand, if you can just win your division, you are certainly going to get in. We certainly put everything we

had into it last year. We came up short. Obviously I understand what you are saying because the roster is completely different now, but --

Q. Do you feel more equipped to do that now?

ARTHUR SMITH: Every year that's what you're trying to do, is to win. I don't know how else to put it. I mean, we're putting everything we have into doing that.

Q. There's a lot of names you know still on the street in terms of veterans. I don't know if you consider the volume of them typical or not, but after the draft and the undrafted free agency, do you reset and look back at those guys maybe more after the draft than before?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, there are some guys that don't want to sign until after the draft.

Q. Sure.

TERRY FONTENOT: So there's those. There's also some names, right, that they're not the same players that they were before, and there's a reason so there's a combination.

There are some guys that have opportunities that want to wait to sign, and there are some guys that they're names that are still out there, but they're not at the same level. They might not have the opportunities.

But to answer your question, absolutely. There's still players that are on our radar. You have the leagues, the XFL, and these leagues, and there are some good players playing in those leagues. So we'll continue to work through it.

Like we always say, it's 24/7, 365.

Q. Just one general observation now that the dust has settled on this draft. Not all the way because you are going into the eighth round as you all called it last year. How do you all feel? You got six new picks.

TERRY FONTENOT: Have you placed them all on your depth chart already?

Q. Yeah.

ARTHUR SMITH: I wish one of these days you catch somebody coming up here and are like, hey, we feel awful. We didn't get anybody we wanted (laughing).

TERRY FONTENOT: You put them all at the bottom?

Q. Yeah.

ARTHUR SMITH: Maybe someday somebody will do that. We have everybody we targeted.

Q. They're on their way up.

TERRY FONTENOT: We do feel real good about it. A lot of work goes into it. You just don't know how -- you don't know how it's going to go. There's a real -- you get really anxious before the draft starts.

Once you get to that point where, okay, now you have to sit and wait. I mean, there's not many things like it where you are sitting there watching, and you don't know what's going to happen and how it's going to affect everything else.

It's so unique, and you fall in love with these players through the process, and you're going to get some of them, you're not going to get some of them. But the way the results, the way everything went from the start of the offseason through the draft and, again, we'll keep going, but we're very excited about where this team is.

Q. Just probably for some later on, the cost of constructing a draft board. I heard a \$20 million number. Is that --

TERRY FONTENOT: Cost in terms of what?

Q. Just putting together a draft board, the scouts, the planes, everything that you all do, background checks, security checks. Just, you know, I don't know if you all see the number, but I heard he -- it just stunned me that that was the number.

TERRY FONTENOT: It's expensive, but you're investing in your research, and it's that important because you're making major investments, whether you are talking about a free agent you're bringing in, whether you are talking about draft picks. You are. You are making major investments. It's really important to us to know everything that we can about the players, the people to know everything we can about them.

Look, we're flawed human beings evaluating other flawed human beings, so it's not a perfect science. It's never going to be a perfect science, but it's our job to make sure our process is to a point to where we can do our very best to cover everything, and it's that important.

Yeah, it's a big number, but -- look, we said this before. This organization top to bottom, from our owner, Arthur Blank, any resource that we need, anything we need to make sure that we can build the best possible team that's

available to us, and it's our job to -- we're not just looking for -- because everybody has the next best thing that they can sell you, but we want to make sure that we go through the process and find things that are really going to help us and be effective and help us in the process. Whatever we need, if it can help us win, then it's going to be provided to us, and it's that important.

ARTHUR SMITH: That's a good question, but you talk about return on your investment, right? You don't want to ever -- you don't want to waste anybody's time or money, and there is a cost to everything.

It's not just return you may get on the particular picks you put into this draft. There's information you get that can help you in free agency, that can help you post-draft, and certainly a lot of these players, you guys know how transactional the National Football League is. Again, in training camp or when guys are free agents and the relationships are here. You are at the combine or you're at a pro day, and the guy's coach is playing in college. It's not just this draft class, but it can pay off as the year goes on or maybe a couple of years from now, and that's what you hope as you sustain success in a program. It's a great question.

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