

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

Sunday, September 10, 2023

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Arthur Smith

Postgame Press Conference



Atlanta - 24, Carolina - 10

Q. Coach, could you discuss the play of Jessie Bates and the overall play of your defense here today.

ARTHUR SMITH: I think it was overall a great team win and the way we're built. The reason we wanted to put those guys in our program, when you're playing a rookie quarterback here at home, those guys were in tune to everything. There's some things that he anticipated, and he's a great player. That's why we signed him. There's all those guys -- Kaden, David.

I think what I was really pleased about our guys and really our staff, a couple things we weren't clean and executing early on, especially in the pass game. It wasn't just the obvious protection, there was some spacing things that after week 1 we all got to do a better job.

But we're able to play as a team. Whether you get in there in field position and get the turnovers. I thought those guys, as the second half went, they wore them down.

When you get a win like that, you're not behind the count. We know we've got a lot of work. That's the National Football League is to keep improving. Don't ever stay the same. Guys made big plays in the end. It was good for Kyle to go get that ball and Des to deliver it.

Like I said, we weren't clean enough in the first half in the passing game. That's on everybody. I promise you we'll get cleaned up. As you can see the mental resolve, and that's how you win games like that as a team. So we'll be back to work tomorrow. Very, very happy for our guys.

Q. Is there anything from Bijan that surprised you?

ARTHUR SMITH: No. That first touchdown, that's the stuff we see every day in practice. That didn't surprise me. You guys get excited about a running back, but he's a football player. There's a lot of them all over the place, and there's still more he can do.

He's such a unique player and a unique balance. So you get in there and get in the red zone. The guy made a heck of a play, but we saw that every day in practice. I thought that he'd do something to help us win today, and he did. I'm glad it helped us win.

Q. You obviously weren't here when this streak started, but this is the first time this franchise has been over .500 since 2018.

ARTHUR SMITH: Every season is different. Every team is different. And I know we're just happy to get a win. I'm just going by recent history. Last year we were up, and we didn't finish.

This year a little different mindset. The guys made plays. Again, maybe not going your way. Give Brian Burns credit. Didn't know what kind of mindset he'd be in. Went after him early, but he came to play and rocked the game. So he did it.

Those guys, they wore him down. That's a physical group and a well conditioned group.

Q. If I were to tell you that Desmond would have more receptions than Drake and you would win, would you believe me?

ARTHUR SMITH: Not to be rude, I'm going to cut you off. Let the fantasy guys worry about that. We've got to clean some things up. We can all be better in our spacing, and the targets is the most misunderstood thing in the National Football League. The progressions, their spacing, somebody underneath is not right, that's the stuff where I'm a little irritated as a coach.

We had it fixed at halftime. That's on me. That's on everybody. We don't care. All we care is 1-0. That's how we improve or it's not going to sustain every week. Every week is its own entity. We don't care about the stats. We care about winning.

Q. Two, what did you think of Des' overall performance?



ARTHUR SMITH: It takes 11 on offense, it does. Whether it's protection, spacing, operation -- so many things that go into it. At the end of the day, I promise you, he's going to think about how he lost the ball. It was good for Kyle to get that. He threw a helluva football. Same thing, I trusted him right there. Great.

Talk about a play, Zach. It was designed for the X. Quarterback knows. They got the look. Tried to take Drake out and went to Mack Hollins. That's how you win football games. That's what I'm proud of.

It's not perfect. We've got a lot of work ahead of us, but I'd much rather do that 1-0. We've got a bunch of real guys in that locker room. Happy as hell I get to coach them.

Q. On defense, new starters, new coordinator, and to have that side come together, ten points allowed, three takeaways. What is the key for them to play so well so early?

ARTHUR SMITH: It starts with the type of players. Great football staff, and they can communicate. They're able to go get guys that they thought fit. It's not just names, it's chemistry and fit. Thankfully our organization allows us to build this thing and go get the right players.

In simple terms, you want to see the return on that investment. At least we saw that today.

Q. Arthur, you mentioned Brian Burns. What does he bring to a defense? What do you see in him?

ARTHUR SMITH: They've got a lot of good players in there. Derrick Brown is one of the better interior players that nobody talks about. Want to know how he got to Auburn? He was one of the guys that everybody tossed out. That guy's been a pain in our side since I've been here.

He made one play before the half, but I thought those guys, it's all good, especially Brown. It's a good thing we're not talking about it on the line. Bergeron, it wasn't too big for him either, just like Bijan. Derrick Brown is good. Shaq Thompson, he's so smart. When you're in a chess match with those guys, you got to play your A game.

They've invested a lot in their defense. So it's a battle. Our guys know them well, whether they change the scheme or not. And Burns, he fits -- when you're able -- nobody ever gives the guy on the inside enough credit. He's a terrific edge rusher. If you're a terrific edge rusher and you don't have dudes inside, but you can take every protection scheme right to them. That's a credit to

Carolina.

Again, Burns, give him a lot of credit. The way he started the game, but we weren't going to sit there and repeat the same mistakes and let him wreck the game. Thankfully we pivoted, and our guys didn't blink. We came away with the win.

Q. I know there were times on the sideline you were sort of looking at the tablet to figure out what was going on with the offense. You mentioned spacing. Was there anything else that jumped out to you, and did it surprise you at all?

ARTHUR SMITH: Not surprise me. Was I confident? Yes. Again, there's a lot of ways to look at it. You can spin it however you want. The ultimate result was we won.

But it's why you take those shots late in the game. You learn lessons, or you say, look, we're not going to sit here and just get in there and pack the paint and play for yards. Dawson, let's give it a take. Momentum certainly plays into how the other side is playing. They put a lot into it.

If I give you a real reason, it's going to sound excuses, but we'll get back to work tomorrow. I've got a lot of faith in our guys.

Q. Can you take us through your challenge on the no fumble? Was that something you went to hear in your ear from somebody --

ARTHUR SMITH: Scuffle thing, right? There's an emotional sideline. Everyone has their opinion on the sideline. We have a process and the way it starts, again, teamwork and communication. So I want to hear it confirmed upstairs.

There's trust too. Some players, they claim they got the ball every time. Our guys were convicted. I got the call upstairs. So I went with it. Good teamwork.

Q. Arthur, it looked like early on you were content to sit back a little bit against Bryce and sort of make him think and make him sort of figure things out, then you came on late. Is that an accurate assessment of the way you played?

ARTHUR SMITH: There's so much unknown. It's kind of like you get into round 1 and there's sparring. Don't like the ball to pop up the first play. You don't want to sit there and be obvious that you're trying to throw something different at them. Didn't go really well for multiple reasons.

But you adapt. You're able to play the momentum off the

turnover. Able to punch it in. Bijan made a heck of a play. I thought in the second half, you adapt to certain things in the game. That's what coaching is. Our guys did, and they earned a lot of trust that had been built up.

Like I said, we'll get back to work. Happy I get to coach guys like that.

Q. Defensively, the way you all approached early on against Young, it felt like you were content not to come after him early.

ARTHUR SMITH: They threw the screen on the first third down. We had a chance to eat them up and made a play. Got the first down. We had a stop on the fourth down after that series. I don't claim to have a photographic memory of some of these guys. My memory is certainly correct, and you can fact check me as you're scrolling through your game notes.

I believe that was Baker on the third down on the screen. We came after him. I think he threw to Shanault, and we stopped them on fourth and one. That was a big play. We adapted some of our rush plans. I thought David might have had some big rushes late. We started to hit him and weren't getting to him early. That's credit to them, but we started to wear them down.

Q. With regards to Des in that first half when things were going a little bit sideways, what do you just observe from him and his kind of composure and mentality and that kind of stuff?

ARTHUR SMITH: He's not afraid of any moment. What happens sometimes is guys have to do more. It's a long series. It's the National Football League. Sometimes when people are pressing -- the good thing about Des is you can actually coach him. He's one of those guys that doesn't take the ball and go home.

When Dave and I are talking to him, just get back to your basics. When you don't have that trust, you don't call those plays.

Q. Coach, obviously coming into the season, the secondary was a position group that had a lot of depth. With Jeff Okudah going down, can you talk about as far as what Tre Flowers was able to do.

ARTHUR SMITH: Tre had a great camp. Had a lot of faith in Tre, but that's where you try to build depth. Again, you're trying to play the long game sometimes, so there's a strategy.

So first man up, Brooks, and we thought trying to play the

long game. Mike's had a good week. That's one of the decisions you've got to make. When there's trust built between the staff and the players, and there's some strategy in it involved.

Q. As far as the adjustments you talk about going into the fourth quarter, it seemed like you guys started moving the defense around and moving them to the front. Was that just the flow of the game?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's coaching. That's what it is. It's the National Football League. You've got a good staff of smart players. That's how you make those adjustments. It doesn't happen. You can't sit there -- it's not like Hollywood. People think they do a great job, and no one's cutting up the emotion.

Somebody asked me about play calling earlier in the week. I believe it was you, Jeff. I mean that. When you've got a good staff, it should go in sync. That's what happens. Guys going back and forth, and it was great communication with the defensive staff, offensive staff, special teams. That's what you have to have that cohesion that allows you to do stuff like that.

They're playing today. Here's what he said. All right on execution, give them credit. The other is the pivot and attack, and we pivot. We certainly wanted to throw it a little bit more in the first half, didn't go very well. So you pivot, and you play the situations. You can't do that if you don't have the right people. Certainly it gives us a chance because of the way we're built.

Q. Tyler Allgeier obviously did great things for you last year, but he's in the midst of taking another step forward in his career. How did you feel about the way he was able to run the football today?

ARTHUR SMITH: Mike petry does a great job. He ran awfully well early on, so give and take. You've got to pivot. We'll happily go back and get some things cleaned up and look at it. But Tyler had a couple of carries. Again, you have guys like that, stating the obvious, you take a player like that or Bijan, they're different players. You've got selfish guys that don't trust you, and it can go sideways.

What you saw is when you go from Bijan to Tyler, two pretty damn good football players. Like I said, it was a heck of a run he made. He's just so strong, and so is Bijan. It's a joy to coach them.

Q. Coach, you mentioned the fourth down stand there early on in the game. Can you just elaborate a little bit more on the importance of that?

ARTHUR SMITH: The turnover, yeah, absolutely. They make the decision. Everybody's got the same numbers. I would be shocked if they kicked it. It's obvious, kind of happens in baseball. Something that was written by Theo Epstein. So you expect people to do that, especially in that big old plus territory. So our guys are wired for it. It's something we practice all the time.

It doesn't mean you're going to execute it, and that's where it's on our players. It's huge, though. Everyone look at a three-point swing.

Q. Was that a workload split for the running backs sort of what you expected?

ARTHUR SMITH: Certainly you want to have longer drives. We've got to get better on third down. It's also the game plan. If you go back and look at where Bijan played and he plays the nontraditional running back in there, everything else is package plays. Make the run or the screen or the pass or whatever.

Certainly you get in at halftime, and you run the ball well and he had enough carries, that's when you pivot.

Q. Allgeier has talked a lot about feeling more confidence and comfortable in the second year. How have you seen that translate thus far?

ARTHUR SMITH: It translated pretty well today. Tyler is a special player. I think he's got a unique mindset.

Q. Going back to the first question about the running back splits and everything like that, if my math is correct, 70.8 percent of the total 48 offensive touches were two running backs, either Tyler or Bijan. Was that something that went into this game thinking it was going to be that?

ARTHUR SMITH: No, we're going to try to be more balanced. Give Carolina credit or put it on me, we've got to be cleaner. In the second half, the way the game was going, you just pivot. We certainly want to be more balanced.

Somehow we come out of this game winning, and it's like go run it again. But we've got to do a better job.

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