

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

Monday, February 5, 2024

Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Terry Fontenot

Raheem Morris

Greg Beadles

Weekday Press Conference



We had a wonderful team working, supporting us, doing a lot of research, working through all the interviews, so I want to thank all them for the great work they've done for the last month or so, and excited that we've landed on the right leader with Raheem here for our team.

We will start out and have a few words from Terry. He'll pass it over to Raheem, and then David Bassity is going to moderate us and we'll wrap up before 3:00.

TERRY FONTENOT: Again, like Greg said, really appreciate everyone being here, particularly Raheem's family. Very exciting. It's a very exciting day for all of us.

I'll go back. I haven't addressed anyone, so I want to go back to the season just briefly. And I understand that we all had high aspirations for the season, and we didn't reach our marks and we didn't get to where we needed to get to this past season. There were some positives but clearly we didn't reach our goals. That's on all of us, starting with me.

At the end of every season, whether you win seven games, 12 games, or you win the Super Bowl, you're always going to take a step back and look at every process and go through the entire organization and look at areas you need to improve.

That's what we're always going to be doing. We're always looking in the mirror, the entire building, we're all looking at ways to improve.

We understand that difficult decisions are made, and we know Arthur Blank has said that those decisions aren't taken lightly. I want to acknowledge Arthur Smith. We had a great relationship, a very collaborative relationship, and I would say from 2021 to this point right now, we do believe that this team is in a different place, and Arthur played a big part in that. We wish him and Allison and his family the absolute best moving forward as they take their next steps in Pittsburgh.

As we get into the search, as Greg said, it was a thorough process, very detailed and organized. Very appreciative of everyone involved in the search. Our entire organization

BRETT JEWKES: Good afternoon. Welcome. Want to make a quick announcement before we get started. Our owner, Arthur Blank, is very disappointed to not be here today. He had a minor medical issue come up over this weekend and he's being treated. He's doing really well and he's resting today.

I've spoken to him several times over the last couple hours. He knows you have questions you want to ask him, so we are going to hopefully work on a teleconference later in the week as he starts to feel better. Stay tuned on details for that, but that is why Arthur is not here. He's in great spirits and is really excited about the man that's sitting in the center seat. He's very pleased that FIFA yesterday added another validation to his vision for what this building is and what it means long-term for the great city of Atlanta.

With that, we're going to get started. We'll turn it over to our president of the Atlanta Falcons, Greg Beadles.

GREG BEADLES: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to Mercedes-Benz Stadium on this very historic exciting day for us, for the Falcons. We're excited to welcome Raheem Morris here as our next head coach and his beautiful family over here. Welcome his beautiful family back to Atlanta as well.

Thank you to all the media for being here and covering us throughout the year. We do appreciate it. Thank you to all our fans, friends, family that are watching with us online today, as well. We appreciate all your support.

First, just a few things about the search itself. We began in earnest back on January 8. After the press conference, and as you've seen, we had 14 just outstanding candidates. Arthur promised that we would have a very thorough process, thorough search, and we did.



was involved.

There are some specific people, I'm not going to start naming people, but it was an excellent process, very thorough. There were excellent candidates from former head coaches to there were some candidates that have become head coaches since then, and also some that we know will be head coaches.

We appreciate that because that's not easy to go through that. Some guys are in the playoffs. You really put yourself out there when you're going through that process.

It was very thorough, very detailed. We appreciate everyone that was involved in it. Through that search, it was very clear that there was one person that really stuck out, and that's Raheem Morris. It was his infectious energy, his natural leadership, his charisma, his football instincts and intelligence, but also his collaborative mindset and the way he puts people around him and listens and empowers people.

His clear vision for what we're going to do here, and he's been to two Super Bowls -- he's been to three Super Bowls. He's got two rings and we're going to get him another one. That's our charge.

It's been very fun working with Raheem these last 10 days. I don't know when he sleeps because he's on the West Coast and I'm on the East Coast and he usually wakes me up in the morning about 5:00 I'm getting texts from him. He's a FaceTime guy. He likes to FaceTime. I know his family well already. I've met Nicole and the kids because we're always FaceTiming.

It's been excellent as we've gone through in putting together the staff. The next step will be to work through our roster and really get into that, formulating our off-season plan, how we're going to attack free agency, how we are going to attack the draft, and we are going to make sure we put together a team that is competing for championships and that is having sustained winning.

That's what our owner, Arthur Blank, our organization, and most importantly, our fans deserve.

With that, very excited to join Arthur Blank, Greg, our entire organization in welcoming back to Atlanta Raheem and his family. Thank you.

RAHEEM MORRIS: This is a pretty tight crew today I can see. I know Allison is back there. She's pretty excited about this. This is not one of these tight situations. I want you guys to be comfortable in this environment because we're going to be here a lot, right, and it's pretty cool.

I wanted to start off by first thanking my family. I know they've been mentioned three times already, but I wouldn't be in this position without my extended family, my immediate family, whatever you want to call them over there. My lovely wife, Nikki, my daughter -- I can't even look at her anymore -- my 13 year old daughter, Amaya, my eight-year-old little princess over there, Maliya, and that little dude we call Jalen. Fired up to have those guys here for me, and what a wonderful deal.

My mom and dad I'm fortunate to be here, and just delighted, and doing it for the second time and getting this position and then having your parents be a part of that and a part of getting back into the situation -- I can't tell you how good that feels as a son and as a person inside this family and being with these guys, and just everybody that came today to support me and my in-laws, my brother-in-law, my mother-in-law, everybody involved. It is absolutely outstanding that they're all here with us, with me.

My agent in the back, Brian Levy, he's got the camera. He thinks he is part of the media today. Outstanding guy, him and Cedric Saunders. I wouldn't be here without the Lazans (phonetic) and their help and everything they have done for me and everything happening with our family and everything that's moving forward. I thank you guys for coming to support me today.

Next, I just wanted to thank the Blank family. You know how close and tightly related I am with the Blank family, but to make this thing happen, to be a part of each other, to so thankful, so thoughtful. What a process that I went through with everybody.

Just the National Football League in general, but having it be a part of the Atlanta Falcons is absolutely outstanding.

I know the family well, from the sons in Josh and Max, to Arthur himself, to everybody that was involved, that was there every day on a day-to-day basis, this organization with Greg, with Rich McKay, with Terry and everybody that was a part of that, with Brett Jewkes, all of us.

It's so nice to come back and see familiar faces from when you were here the first time and to be able to meet some new people that you're really excited to work with and you're really ecstatic to work with. That was such an awesome feeling.

I also want to thank the people where I come from in LA, the Kroenkes and their family and Josh and Stan and just the all-out support that they gave me all the way from the top, going to Les Snead, Sean McVay, Kevin Demoff, Tony



Pastor and the people in LA were outstanding in the way they've supported me through the whole process. They've guided me through the whole process. They've let me grow. They've matured, everything you've done in this business, and some of those things.

I want you let you guys to know I do understand the importance of being the first Black coach in Atlanta history without an interim tag. Understand the importance of that for us, understand that importance for the people before me, the people after me, the current people right now.

I understand the importance of that and how important that is to this city, particularly where we are right now in the mecca of Black history. I think that's very important to acknowledge.

The next thing I want to talk about is really the "we" factor. I am so excited to collaborate with Terry Fontenot and his family and our organization and his group and everything that they've done. Since I've left they've done nothing but build pieces and get just a tightly-knit team put together.

They've added to the culture that I can't wait to be a part of and add to, and I think that was a really important factor for me to come back and a really important factor of allowing me to come back and be a part of that.

I can't say enough about what the people around me have done moving forward and how we're going to move forward together.

Make no mistake about it; the community supports us on Sundays to go out and win the game. It's our job to support this community in a bigger way than you can even imagine. I understand the importance of that, as well. This Atlanta community, I can still remember the day of painting houses and all of our projects that we do.

This whole family, this AMB Group is an outstanding thing to be a part of, and I just can't wait to be a part of that thing, fully invested in doing all the stuff we want to do with this community.

The last thing I'm going to mention is the reason we're here. It's going to be a winning culture, and we're here to win football games.

At the end of the year, there is only one team that's happy, and Terry mentioned it, but I've only been in that position twice in my career, and I can't wait to go back there again, and I can't wait to do it with you.

You guys, the media, you're part of this, too. You're part of this team. I know you guys are all serious because it's the

opening press conference. You're giving me the mean looks. But I'll get that out of you soon enough.

Let's shake this crowd up, man, and let's have some fun. And let the next part of this press conference begin with David Bassity leading the way.

Q. Raheem, you mentioned obviously this is not your first go-around as a head coach. What did you learn from those three years in Tampa? I know it's a long time ago, but what did you learn from those three years in Tampa that gives you the confidence that it will be more successful this time around?

RAHEEM MORRIS: It's the overall maturity of the profession is really what you've got to lean on, the overall growth. Since Tampa, I've dedicated really my professional development to helping whoever I work for at the time. I was fortunate enough to go to Washington and really work with Mike Shanahan and being around it and be around a guy that's won Super Bowls as a head coach, be with him and just really develop and him allowing me to be behind the curtain, so to speak.

Moving forward to here with Dan Quinn and going through the process and doing what we were able to do and doing a lot of winning football games and being able to be a major part of helping and contributing to those factors.

Having the ability to go out to LA, get the job finished, being behind the curtains there, as well, and being with that crew, it's been one of the things that you just can't ever forget about, one of the things that you can never look over and glaze over, the accomplishments that you have in your career.

But now I'm coming back, and being a part of the collaboration, the shared vision, all the things you want to do with Terry and what he's starting to build, and so exciting to come back and going through this process. And really going through it in a detailed fashion, I think that's the thing helping us move forward.

I'm fully prepared. I been preparing for this since the last day since I was in Tampa. You spend the rest of your time and the rest of your coaching career figuring out when you're going to be ready for that moment. This is the moment, and now it's time to go, Mike, and I can't wait to do it with you, even though I can't find you in the crowd.

Q. Terry, three weeks ago, a month ago, whatever it was, when Arthur Blank and Rich McKay were sitting up there they said that you would have input. How much input did you end up having in this entire process as you're the one up here at least from a



football perspective up here answering questions today since Arthur Blank is not here?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, I appreciate the trust in Arthur allowing me to lead that process. There were a lot of people obviously heavily involved in that process from Greg Beadles, Rich McKay, our assistant GM Kyle Smith, Ryan Pace.

A lot of people put a lot of work into that process, and we know the ultimate decision is on Arthur Blank, but I've learned a lot from the way Arthur leads because he is making the final decisions, but he is collaborative and he wants to hear, he wants everyone to be involved and wants to hear what everyone has to say.

So I was empowered to lead that process. We know Arthur made the ultimate decision, but it was an excellent process, and we're excited about the result.

Q. This coaching search had a lot of big names, as well, with Coach Belichick. You can talk to the casual fan about his resume, not saying you're not qualified, but for some people who might be apprehensive about this decision, how can you assure Falcons fans they made the right decision?

RAHEEM MORRIS: When you're talking about competing, anything that we do, you're always talking about going against the very best. And Coach Belichick, however you want to word it or write that, he's going to be considered the very best, if not the best to ever do it in our profession.

I've got so much respect for what he's done in his career. I would never, ever feel slighted or feel any other way than what people would feel about Coach Belichick.

But you've got a process in place and you go through it and let the best man win. Whatever the case may be, I'm just fortunate to be sitting here in front of you. But to tell Falcons fans that we're going to go out there and do because of our football character, being accountable, being disciplined, being coachable, being dependable, I think those are the things that will get us going in the right direction.

I don't think we can really focus on who was in the process, what you were doing in the process. It's just like going to play a game. When you go play those games, it really doesn't matter who's across those lines. It's our job to go out there and get wins. That was my job in this whole process is how I looked at it.

I got so much respect for anybody who's interviewed or been a part of this process. I can speak the world about all

of them. It's not just Coach Belichick, it's all of them. It's all the people that we interviewed. Do I know the names? No, because they didn't matter at the time. Most of them were gray matter because it was just a competition. You're going out there presenting your best self, being your best self, being the version of yourself, all I can be every single day.

Q. At what point when you left in 2020, could you ever have imagined that you would be back here being the head coach for the Atlanta Falcons?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You hit the nail on the head. This is coming home. When you get a chance to go back home in this profession, it is extremely important. It is extremely critical to everybody involved. That was a special moment, not just for me but for my family, for everybody involved, for the media members that I see around, that I know.

I can feel the excitement through my texts. I can feel the excitement through the phone calls. I can look at DJ Shockly right now feel the excitement even though he is trying to be very serious in the back.

But this has been a process for me that has been outstanding and so much fun. I can't tell you, I can't express the joy that I have right now to be able to come back and work with the Blanks, to be able to come back and work with all these people around me that I've been with for years.

I can talk about this for the rest of the press conference. Probably may bore you. But I don't know if you've ever been in this spot to coming back home, but this is certainly the best feeling in the world.

Q. Going off of that, I'm curious from 2020 to now being here as the head coach, where do you feel like you've grown and changed both personally and professionally to make this feel different?

RAHEEM MORRIS: That goes back to me talking about where I've come from. Getting a chance to go help a friend in Sean McVay go win a championship. Getting a chance to be around Les Snead and really be jealous of that relationship.

When I got there, one of the first things I told Sean just noticing how we moved through daily rhythm and routine and things that we've done was, man, I am jealous of you and Les Snead's relationship. I said, to watch you guys collaborate and move in silence, be able to have your communication ongoing, have your communication consistent, honest, open, all of those thing you guys do with each other, that is the next step.

The maturity level that you get from that and being able to watch that and also talking to one of your really good friends while you're winning a championship, having the ability to go through some hard times that following year, having to get a start with a really young team and start with your fundamentals, physicality, start with controlling the ball, starting with some of those pillars, I thought was a really cool process. It was a really cool learning experience for me.

It was no more fun than helping one of your best friends in the world, one of the people you care about, win a championship with an organization, having a chance to take all of those lessons learned, being able to listen, being able to communicate, and now bringing it back here to the Atlanta community to go out here and win, what we need to do. I've got a lot of confidence that we can do that with the people that we know are here.

Q. Could you just give us a little insight into your coaching staff and why Robinson and Lake were the right guys to bring over?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Yeah, I can talk about Robinson first. Robinson is our offensive coordinator for those who don't know. I explained to these guys when we talked about our staff and we talked about this collaborative effort of going to look for people and being detailed in the people we wanted to bring in, and Robinson in my head and my experience made a lot of sense.

I was around the young Kyle Shanahan, and I saw him really develop and grow into this great play caller that we know that's playing next week. I was around Sean McVay when he was young, really young. He was with my family really, really young. I wanted him grow and develop into this great play caller that we know.

When I talked about it, you start to name the names, the Mike McDaniels, Matt LaFleur, and all the people you were work with. This organization was the first organization to allow me to coach on both sides of the ball, whether it was switching in the middle of the season, whether it was switching during the season.

Whatever the case was. I saw it. I worked with people. I was with Dirk Koetter, Steve Sarkisian, all those people in the playoffs and I see Zac Robinson, and I see him in the same light. I see him growing, developing, bringing his timing and rhythm and his balance to our offense that we can have go out here and play. And whatever it looks like, it's going to be fast and it is going to be based on those pillars that we talked about earlier.

Those are the things that really just lit me up and made me ecstatic to have an opportunity to bring a guy like Zac Robinson to be a part of this.

I won't go as elaborate into the rest of the people, but I go so far back with Jimmy Lake, talking about our Tampa days, our core beliefs, some of the things we believe in, like mindedness, his ability to go call it in college, really have a real tenure in college where you climb the ladder of the defensive coordinator, going to a head coach, having the ability to go through hard times, fighting through some things.

So the people you want to be around are really people that really fought through the process.

And then I get here and Marquice is here. You're talking about a young, dynamic coach that you can bring and keep a part of your staff because of the people that you know that you been around that you trust and that has hired this guy.

And I thought that was really impressive to me, and I thought that was really important for me to be around the right people. This is a people business, and I'll just talk about my coordinators right now. Less about specifics, but I was really excited to be able to bring those guys to be part of the Atlanta Falcon family.

Q. Raheem, you referred to this as "home." Why?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know, I spent a lot of time in Atlanta before I was in Atlanta. I was a frequent Mountain Sky visitor. That allowed me to be around Arthur and his whole family, his entire family, and be a part of that whole nature of what it looks like.

A big part of what we do here is listening, and when I was here, I had the ability to grow and learn and develop, and switching both sides of the ball like I just mentioned at the same place at the same time doing whatever it takes to win football games.

Being here in 2016 and reaching the pinnacle and just coming up short, that was a real critical moment for me.

So not only knowing the owner as the owner but knowing him on a personal level, I've been hired by Rich McKay three times: In Tampa, here twice -- actually four. You don't get no more home than actually having the ability to talk about those things.

Greg Beadles I remember I walked by this guy in the hallway and we didn't say a word. I would walk by Greg Beadles at 4:00 in the morning and he'd be the only person

in the building and I'd be wondering who is this guy in the building with me, and now he's the president of this organization and we're moving in the right directions.

These people here are just a part of my life. They know my family. I know their families. I can't wait to build this thing. This thing is different.

We spend more time with the people that we work with, sometimes more than our own families, and I have no idea how my wife has made my daughter sit this still for this long and be this patient, but she's done an unbelievable job, and it's no different than what they've done with me and my development.

That's why this is home.

Q. When you walked in the door at Tampa Bay, what did you think was the single most important part of a head coach's job, and is that answer different as you sit there right now?

RAHEEM MORRIS: It is 100 percent. When you're 32 years old you've got all the answers. Just ask me and I'll tell you.

What you find out is it's a learning process every single day, and you'd better be able to lean on people and talk to people and find out what is the best thing that works.

When I took this job and I got offered it by Terry and Arthur, obviously, making the decision, but I told him in my interview process, I said, hey, I don't need to be the smartest person in the building. I want to hire. I want to have. I want to contribute. I want to collaborate with all the smart people that you've assembled.

You're talking about Karl Pierburg back there. You're talking about one of the smartest men I know. I want to be able to collaborate with all those guys and get into the building and do those things and find out what's the best way to move forward, everybody that we're doing. Every person that we've brought into the staff, whether it be any position, whether it's chief of staff Steve Scarnecchia, and you find a guy like that to give direction and do the things you want to do and you join them with Sarah who's going to absolutely take us to the next level, what we want to do and how we collaborate and how we go about our business. We are talking about Terry, being with Kyle and talking about Ryan Pace.

Their development over the last 10 days has just been so much fun that I'm so excited to get to the job and actually get to Flowery Branch. I heard it's a construction site, but I can't wait to get out there to do what we need to do.

All of those things and all of those factors that you build throughout the process help you learn and grow, and if you don't get -- I learned a long time ago in Tampa Bay from Jon Gruden. I took my first job in 2002 the first time Rich McKay hired me, and Jon always told me, you either get better or you get worse. I've been in the process of getting better since those days and that moment leading up to this right now.

Q. Unfortunately seven years ago was a seminal moment for Atlanta sports as you were on the sideline to watch it. I'm wondering how much appreciation you have for the pain of that moment and how it's shaped some of the Falcon fans, and have you allowed yourself to think about for yourself and the fans of Atlanta and the folks that have been through what that was what it would be like to kind of bring it all back home and you be a part of that and what it would mean for this community?

RAHEEM MORRIS: I'll tell you this: It is a part of coming home. That 2016 loss, it stings as bad as any one I've ever had. Actually, the worst I've ever had on a stinging momentum, right.

To be able to come back here and get some real cool redemption, I want to watch Arthur Blank, Warrick Dunn, some of these guys hold up that trophy.

Q. Do you think --

RAHEEM MORRIS: Are you going to let me finish the question or are you going to ask another question before I finish? I'm trying to give you these real cool dramatic pauses, and you just don't want to buy in.

But that moment for us and our fans -- it's just not that moment. We were a part of it. We were, all of us. We added some pieces. We got different players. We got new leadership. We got different things in place that's going to help us rewrite that history, and I'm going to be writing it with the fans, and they're going to be writing it with us.

That support that I'm going to show those guys and the support that they're going to show us, we will change that narrative because we can.

Go ahead now.

Q. Do you think the pieces -- do you see enough pieces here that that process looks like it could be on its way, and is there a mindset of how long it would take?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know what the cool part of that is you go through this process and you talk about all these other jobs. You go home, and every time you think about interviewing for a different spot, you think about how you would create, how you would form, how you would collaborate with the people that are there, what you want to do, and this one you sit home and you're just thinking, man, I hope Terry calls me today.

Come on, Terry, just pick up the phone and make the call. Somebody go in there and talk to Arthur and let's get this thing done.

You do it because of the things that everybody here was a part of. Terry has done a great job along with the people and the help around this building in order to form the team and put them in position to go out there and win. It's a big ol' elephant in the back of the room, and who's going to be the trigger man, who's going to do those things.

Let's go collaborate together. Let's go figure out those things. Let's go put ourselves in the best position to go win football games. I've got a lot of confidence in the people in this room that we can.

Q. Raheem and Terry, kind of dovetailing that, taking this job right now with an owner who's clearly expressed a desire to win now with a roster that looks like it's ready to win now, I know you're in year one and there usually is some grace period, but Terry, also in year four, how much pressure do you feel at this moment to get this team to the playoffs and win now in your first year?

RAHEEM MORRIS: If you can give me an opportunity to let me know which owner doesn't give you pressure to win now, I'd like to field that question back to you --

Q. I don't hang out with many NFL owners.

RAHEEM MORRIS: This is what we do. This job comes with pressure, and it comes with pressure that we're all built for. You've got to embrace that. You've got to embrace those moments. You've got to want those moments. We've got to live for those moments.

I don't know about Terry, but I can't wait to go out here and try to win with this man.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, it's exciting, and it's like any other -- obviously all owners are passionate, but man, I think we have the most passionate owner. He wants to win in the worst way. He's no different than that passionate fan in the front. That's who he is.

You get calls at all hours of the night and him just talking about little things because that's all he thinks about is winning and wanting to do everything he can do to win, and he'll provide us anything, literally anything, to help us win, and sometimes it's people like Greg that have to make it happen, that have to do it.

Look, you go to our facility right now and look at what's going on there, it's exciting looking at what our locker room is going to be, what our weight room is going to be, looking at what things -- there's a lot of exciting things going on.

We appreciate that about Arthur Blank, how passionate he is, and we know he'll provide us with whatever we need to win.

RAHEEM MORRIS: The one thing I can add with that, too -- and I know I've been talking too much, guys, but this is my press conference. (Laughter).

The one thing I can add with that is it does come with pressure, no doubt about it. But when you know you are fully supported by the owner the way we are, that makes it special, too. Like we've all got pressure. That's a part of what we do. That's a part of life.

But the support that he shows, the direct communication, all of those things that you know you can have with him is really important to how we move. I think that's important.

Q. How many conversations have you guys had about the quarterback position, and what is that going to look like going forward?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know what's cool about that is we've had very limited conversations about it right now, and the reason being, we've got to formulate a great staff.

We've collaborated more on building this staff, and we're almost done. We've got a lot of people in place, and we want to get people there, and we've had some conversations in brief passing, and we have some ways that we know we can go about getting it, obviously free agency, obviously trade, obviously the draft, and those communications, me just landing the other day, are going to continue to happen.

I'm so tired of looking at this man on Zoom that I'm so happy to be here. He's a lot better looking in person than he is on Zoom. I'm so excited to be here with him and his family and to move forward and to grow our family along with everybody. That is going to be a real cool process of going out there and finding out what we can do and how we can do it.

Q. The attributes, you've been a Super Bowl champion. What are the attributes of a Super Bowl caliber quarterback? You've seen Matt Ryan. You've seen Matthew Stafford. What attributes do you search for in a quarterback to get it right? For Terry, last time we assembled, we were told in the last power structure you reported to Rich McKay and the coach reported to Rich McKay. Now the power structure has changed a little bit where you and Coach Morris report to Arthur Blank. How is that different for the organization moving forward?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, great question, so initially the way the process was is I was partners with the head coach, reported to Rich McKay, and then ultimately Arthur Blank. You had a brand new GM, no experience as a GM, and you had a brand new head coach, no experience as a head coach, so that's natural.

That said, the decision making was always ours. We kept leadership informed and yet the decision making was always ours.

I appreciate having really smart, experienced people around. That's really important. When you talk about Arthur Blank, we have a lot of conversations. Sometimes it's not about football, where we could be talking about a football decision, and he relates it to business and some experiences that he had. That's very valuable. I like having people like that around.

Rich McKay, he's drafted Hall of Fame players. He's hired Hall of Fame head coaches. Tony Dungy told me this story about when he went through that process with him and how a lot of other people would have never hired him, but the way Rich took his time to get to know him, hearing those stories are really valuable.

You love having that kind of experience around you and the willingness to share those stories, not only the ones that were successful, the ones that weren't.

Rich changes his stories up sometimes. They're not always the same. But it's real valuable having that experience around. I appreciate that, and even though he's going to be in some other areas, you appreciate having that around.

Look, I lost my dad last year. My dad never worked in a front office. He never sat in a GM seat. But I appreciated all those conversations with him because there's life experience. So having experienced people around you that you can lean on and communicate with is really important, so you value that.

Again, that said, the decision making was always myself and Arthur Smith at the time. Moving forward, the decision making is myself and Raheem. We keep everyone informed, and that's important.

I'm excited about moving forward with Greg Beadles. In the first two years, Greg was obviously in a different role, and so I didn't have a lot of direction dealings with Greg, and yet you respected him from afar, and then this last year, once he became president, there's a lot of direct dealings with him, and it's been outstanding.

Greg is obviously really smart. He's an excellent communicator. He's very direct and honest. The way Greg went from being an intern and became the president, that's a pretty cool story. So he knows every part of the building, and he's helped me a lot learn about the business part and some of the nuances that I don't understand in the other areas of the business.

So it's been great working with Greg. He's the type of person that whatever we need, he's going to figure out a way to get it done. That's who he is. If it can help us win, he's going to figure out a way.

Again, working with Raheem over these last -- these previous 10 days, it's been really collaborative and fun, and obviously Greg, we've all -- we haven't seen -- I've seen more of these guys than I've seen my wife, and that's why she's here today, because I haven't seen her in a while.

But I've spent more time with them, so I'm very excited about our setup moving forward.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Just to answer the question about the quarterback, we've got a real good vision. Obviously it will be a shared vision between myself, Terry and our coaching staff and a lot of his scouting staff and the people that we're going to involve in that whole process, but we've got a real clear understanding of what it looks like in Atlanta. We've seen it at a very high level.

What was Matt Ryan? You talk about just the people that you've coached, and I just come from a real clear what it looks like quarterback when you're talking about Matthew Stafford. When you get those guys that are elite processors, when you get those guys that are decision makers, when you get those guys that can just cut it loose and play ball and also play with those great fundamental techniques that we talked about, the base, the balance, the short hitches in the pocket, some of those things, it makes you excited to go out there and find those things.

Sometimes not easy to see. Obviously you've got to look at some college tape. Sometimes you can see a little bit

more on free agency tapes. Sometimes you can visualize that thing how you can trade.

But you got all those windows out there, you've got all those avenues, but I've got a lot of confidence in the people that are going to be able to help me and be a part of finding our next quarterback to move forward.

Q. Arthur has talked about the importance of the collaboration between the coach and the GM when it comes to building the roster. What did you see from Raheem in his interviews that let you know this is a guy who I can be on the same page when it comes to that kind of stuff?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yeah, I didn't know Raheem before we got on the Zoom. I didn't know him personally, but I had been hearing a lot of really positive things about him. And even when he was a head coach in Tampa, I told him a few things about his press conferences because I used to listen to him.

I've known about him or of him for a long time, and the way people talk about them is part of it. He's a really good teammate. He's a really good person.

When you think of the personal part of it, all those things, you get into his football acumen, it's really impressive. So I was really excited going into the first Zoom, and after the first Zoom, when you go through it and you really see the way he speaks and the way he communicates, I felt like we've known each other forever.

We kept going through the process, and we'd take our time, and we all of a sudden had the next interview. But all the research that you do on him, all the people, whether it's current players, former players, staff members that he's worked with, and another part, somebody asked about the coaching staff, a lot of guys on our coaching staff were excited about staying because of Raheem, and they had opportunities.

We have coaches that had contracts on the table at other teams, and they held off because they wanted to see if they were going to have an opportunity here, and obviously really honest with him. Hey, the next head coach is going to meet with you, and Raheem went through that process and did that, and guys were really excited about being here. They turned down other opportunities to come back.

He was willing to listen to our opinions and then spend time with them. I knew prior to from doing the research and obviously all the time we spent with him thus far, it's been exciting.

Q. Another quarterback question. You spoke about moving forward to find the right quarterback, and we've talked about the roster as it's currently constructed. As you make the decisions about how to look at quarterback free agency, trade, draft, how important is it to make decisions about is this roster ready to win with just help from the right guy taking the snap? How would you compare that to what you've gone through before with the Rams and Tampa Bay?

RAHEEM MORRIS: There's never one reason why you win a championship. There's always a bunch of different reasons. The quarterback is always the elephant that sits in the back of the room that everybody can talk about, because usually those are the people that get too much blame sometimes or too much credit at times, whether you're talking about the head coach, the quarterback, or whatever the case may be.

But it's the pieces around him. And when you're talking about Terry Fontenot being your general manager, it starts there. The collaboration, the shared vision, some of the things that we were able to do the last 10 days really excites me.

Then you talk about the pieces of the team that's been put in place by everybody here just in general, and you talk about the relentless ability to improve every single day, and you're talking about every position that we have on the football team. You're talking about role clarity for everybody that we have and how they're going to do it and how they're going to go about their business.

You want to make sure that we are trying to get better at all times, and when you're talking about adding a quarterback, those are some of the factors that take you over the top. Those are the things that give you a chance to win every single game.

The quote that Terry mentioned from my Tampa days he talked about, was he said, he never forget when I said there is a mentality before every reality. When he said it, I was like, man, I did say that. That was a cool statement. (Laughter.)

But it's certainly that. It is definitely a mentality before a reality. Let's go put our people in position to win. Let's go find the people to do it. Let's make sure we give real clear defined roles on how we want to do it. Let's get a vision. Let's make it happen and go execute it. That's the key.

Q. After Tampa, your record was what it was. Did you have concerns, worries that you would never get another chance, and what was that wait like? Terry, as

far as you leading the search, can you describe what that entailed, how your role fit in the process?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You don't know me very well, but I definitely don't think like that. I'm a driven person. I'm willing to fight any obstacle put in front of me.

My thought process was never having the opportunity to do it again. It was more about finding the right opportunity and people to do it with, because usually that's the most important thing when you're doing any of these type of jobs, like who are you doing it with.

I really don't care about any of the other things. Circumstances are circumstances, how you go about your business is how you go about your business. But coming here, bringing it full circle, doing it with these people, Greg Beadles, Rich McKay, Terry, Arthur Blank, Dukes, man, I am excited. This was the right opportunity. This is the opportunity. This is our opportunity. That's how I've always thought that way.

I've never gone into that state of mind, and I won't allow myself to. I've got a lot of reasons over to my left why that won't happen. A lot of mentally tough people over there. I don't know if you know my brother-in-law Michael, but he's pretty mentally tough. He's the real deal.

TERRY FONTENOT: So it was really collaborative, like we said, and Arthur Blank is going to make the ultimate decision, as he did, but the entire process was collaborative. When I say lead the search, in regards to the interviews, I was leading the interviews, and there were other people, and it was very detailed and organized, and the way we asked questions, the way we went through and made sure we got the right answers and made sure we assessed everything, and it was a very detailed, organized process, but I led that process, if that makes sense.

Q. You knew you'd have to talk about a lot of things in this press conference, but you mentioned very early that it wasn't lost on you that you're the first full-time Black head coach here for the Atlanta Falcons. Why is that such a big deal for you, and why is that not lost on you? How cool is it to be sitting alongside Terry, as well?

RAHEEM MORRIS: I'll start with the Terry question first. It's really cool to be sitting next to him. I think you find guys in your life and you want to be a part of and you want to work with. These last 10 days have been pretty special. But it started even special just throughout the process. The Zoom interview that turned into the in-person, and it really turned into this really cool collaboration just in those small moments of time. I thought that was a really cool

spot to build.

You mentioned being the first Black coach without the interim tag, like I talked about earlier, but that's not about me. That's about us. All of us. That is the progress. That is the movement. That is what we look for. That's been talked about every single process that I've been through.

I believe I told someone, I can't remember who I told, but I told somebody in this whole process, you know the coolest part about this process was, that it wasn't even brought up about it being a lack of diversity, about there being a lack of opportunity for Black people to be head coaches.

I think there was three in this cycle. I don't know exactly, but it was never even brought up. I thought that was a real cool moment, that that was less about what we talked about and was more about the right people for the job and the right placement for people in their jobs than that.

That's why I thought it was pretty cool, because it was more about the people before me, it was more about the people after me. And particularly that little one sitting over there in Jalen. It's more about him.

Q. For you, what do you feel like is the biggest difference between the Raheem Morris who's sitting here now and the one that was on that sideline just a couple years ago and was potentially going to be the head coach back then? Obviously here now. What are the biggest difference that you think they saw throughout this interview process?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know, I don't know if it's anything that you saw throughout the interview process. I don't know if you can do it that way. I think it's more about my own personal development. Sometimes you need to get away from each other. You get a chance to go away, and you grow. I certainly didn't have time to sit around and sulk about the fact that I didn't get it the first time.

It was, find a way to go get better. I went away. I got around some really great people that I mentioned before, got a chance to do those things, got a chance to have some -- the ultimate success in this profession, found a way to really go through adversity and see who comes out of those things, comes out of those moments, and find a way to rebuild it and do it again, all at the same place in a matter of three years. I mean, what a ride.

Before I left LA I went out to dinner with Sean, and we talked about that. I mean, what a ride that was for the last three years. All it did was make me better to come back home, to find a way to finish off 2016 that we didn't get done.

TERRY FONTENOT: I'll add to that, some people aren't open in talking about their previous experiences, whether they went well or didn't. Some people aren't very open about it.

But the openness and the humility and the clear vision of the things that he's seen from all his experiences and how he's adapted, he's very open about that. But what stuck out about that is I know how smart he is and I know the acumen and the experience, all that stuff. There's not many people that can go -- these are the best in the world at what they do. To go on either side of the ball, that's pretty rare.

But the humility, the natural humility in talking about things and being very open about how he would adjust, that really stuck out.

GREG BEADLES: You probably can't tell that Raheem is a pretty positive person. I think that was something that made an impression on us was the hard times he has gone through in the past and the learnings, that's what he -- he turned it into a learning.

There's a lot of people in this industry, if it didn't work out somewhere that they're bitter about that and they can't let go of it. I definitely saw that in Raheem, that he wanted to learn from it, and he took those learnings, and he's been a mentor to all these guys that are head coaches in the NFL, even when he wasn't a head coach.

They're all looking to him for leadership and mentorship. That made a big impact on us.

Q. Back to the quarterback, you obviously have a lot of people you'll rely on when it comes to making the decision on a quarterback that you might want to acquire. I want to ask in particular about Zac Robinson and his background with quarterbacks, not just coaching them but obviously his background in having evaluated them. How much will you lean on him, and just in general with Zac, how have you observed him working with some of the quarterbacks in LA?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Sure. Zac is one of the cooler guys -- I can't wait until you guys meet him. He's one of the cooler guys to be around. He's played the position. He's got some really cool stories about playing the position at Oklahoma State and some of those things.

He lost to me when I was at Oklahoma State when I was at Kansas State so make sure you remind him of that when he gets there.

But his ability to connect with the quarterback, his ability to relate to the quarterback and what they do and how they do it and how they go about their process, how do they get to the point to be ready to play at this highest level that you need to play in this league I thought stood out to me working with him.

Watching the work that he did with the quarterbacks that's come through when I was in the LA Rams has been absolutely outstanding. Watching his development with golf and watching him come with Matthew Stafford. We go through a year where you do it with a couple different guys in a backup situation.

We add Baker Mayfield midway. He gets it going. We win some games we probably shouldn't even have won because of the ability for those guys to connect.

Getting into this season, we get it going again, we really rally around our quarterback, we find a way to win. The whole team has belief, and that belief just doesn't start with just the player. It's the coaches around him. It's the people around him. It's the things you do that make it really special.

He has an amazing ability to connect with guys and get guys and get the best out of them, no matter what happens, in the most positive way, as Greg just mentioned and alluded to.

But I am fired up to watch him as a teacher. I am fired up to watch him as a mentor, as a confidant, all of those criteria that we talk about when we talk about really good coaches.

The young man just has really high capacity. He really does. I'm fired up to get him here and get us going.

Q. When you first got the recognition that you were going to be named the head coach, you received a lot of praise from several players across the league. What did that mean to you, as well, and in year one, your vision, some of your goals, what you hope to implement?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know, it's always a cool experience when you get praise from players you've coached, players you've been around, players that have retired and moved on and done different things and players that are now coaching and doing some of those things.

That is like the coolest thing in the world because it just shows the impact that you wanted to have in their lives and how you've had it.



I don't even know how you fill up those moments because it's so surreal that it just makes you just know what you've accomplished thus far and how special it is to you and to them that it's just fun. I don't know how else to put it. It's just fun.

As a coach, you're always taught to ignore the noise. That's got to be a part of the noise, as well. But it is cool to get some acknowledgment from people that you work with and coached and to be able to do those things because that's a cool thing.

Q. And year one, some of your goals or vision, what you hope to implement?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know, you don't make predictions in this business. It's too hard. But like I said before, every single year you're competing for a championship. The clear-cut goal for us is obviously to win the South. If you can win the South, you can qualify to get into the playoffs. If you can get to the playoffs, anything can happen.

So you want to go out there and try to get yourself into that mindset, because like Terry mentioned, it is definitely a mentality before it's ever reality, and that's going to be the focus of all of us.

The last thing with that is, why not us? Why not?

Q. We talk a lot about numbers, but outside of number of wins, north of seven, that's the obvious, or a trip to the postseason or something quantitative, Coach, for you, what would define success in your first season as a head coach here? Same for you, Terry; what would you see as success for Coach Rah in the first season?

TERRY FONTENOT: You're going with Rah because it's been a discussion in my house. My kids say go 'Heem. Instagram, it's 'Heem.

Q. If I put Coach and Rah together, I feel like I'm giving him his propers.

TERRY FONTENOT: What was the question again?

Q. What is your definition of success for Coach Raheem outside of the quantitative? We all know what that should look like, north of seven wins at a minimum. But what would be the qualitative where you'd say, hey, mission accomplished, this has been a successful year one?

TERRY FONTENOT: I think we always have to focus more on the process as opposed to focusing on the result.

Let's focus on the process because we know if we focus on that, then we'll reach our goals. We'll reach that.

So right now we've been focusing on the staff, looking at every area and the things that we need to adjust, and we'll get into looking at free agency, looking at the draft, and we won't close any doors, whether we're talking about trades.

We won't close any doors, and we'll formulate our off-season plan, and we'll make sure we get this team prepared for the season.

So I wouldn't get into the results at all right now. I would just focus on the process.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Along the same lines is when you guys come to the games along with the fans, I want you to be able to sit in your seats and say, that team executed. They had great fundamentals. That team controlled the ball, and man, did they play with a physicality.

Like if you get those four things done, which is a part of our pillars of success, you've got a chance to win whatever amount of number of games that you mentioned. Whatever your goals are, whatever your quantitative number is.

If you can do those things every single week, like Terry just mentioned, you will feel really comfortable with the results because of the process you put yourself through.

Q. That leads into my next question. Some fans are still kind of triggered by what happened seven years ago and wonder -- a lot of fans have said they feel it's kind of a throwback to that regime. What would you say to those fans where you want to let them know, hey, not that I didn't learn anything from when I was here before under the Quinn regime, but I'm Coach Raheem and this is who I am and this is my philosophy? What would you say to them?

RAHEEM MORRIS: I really think I had the opportunity to do that on an interim basis a couple years ago and change the dynamic on what things look like. Got a lot of like-minded philosophies with Coach Quinn. Got a lot of like-minded things that you do like about it. But there's some subtle differences in all of us as people and as humans and how we want to move forward.

I think it's less about telling people what's going to be different. It's more about showing people what's going to be different.

I think -- I don't have to do it myself is the beautiful part about it. It's a collaborative effort with Terry, with Greg,

with Arthur Blank, with everybody just involved.

I think that's the mindset and if that's the mindset you will continue to get better every single day, and that's just where we are with that.

Q. It's been since the 2017 season since the Falcons have had a winning season. What do you do to right the ship? The Falcons have come close but haven't been able to get over the hump. What have you seen from the current roster that you like, and what have you seen that you want to make changes to?

RAHEEM MORRIS: When you're talking about getting back to that mindset of what you need to do to get over the hump, it starts right here. It starts right here. Getting with Terry, coming up with this plan, bringing in the coaches that we need to get in place, collaborating the coaches with our scouts, seeing who else we can add to this roster that he's already started to build, done such a great job of doing, being a part of that decision making with him, with me, us collaborating together. I mean, you can't do that enough.

Our thing has to be based on our communication skills and how we move daily throughout our lives. That's the number one thing that's got to happen, to get back to that moment, those playoff type moments that we talked about with all the people across the board.

The second part of that question -- what did you say in the second part?

That's real easy. Drake London, Bijan Robinson. This man has acquired some really good pieces and tools. The things you got to change is just the obvious holes that we'll talk about.

Every team every year is going to have some differences. Every team every year is going to have some changes. Every team is going to be different. We've just got to keep building on those moments when they change, when they don't happen, when they do happen, yada, yada, yada.

TERRY FONTENOT: It's exciting. Right now our scouts just got in town and we're starting our February meetings. We're actually doing them out here because of all the construction. But they'll be rolling for the next 10 days, going through their process.

As soon as the coaches get in, then we'll get together with the coaches and we'll spend a lot of time with them not only working on our roster but talking about the specific profiles of the position, and so we all know what we're going out and looking for, what we're hunting for and

making sure we're all speaking the same language. That's going to be a really detailed process, going through that.

Then again, we go and attack it, and we're going to identify those areas. These are the musts. These are your areas where we have to add to these specific positions. These are the needs. We'll formulate that plan and figure out a way to go get it done.

But it all starts with, like Raheem said, that communication, that collaboration between us, between the coaching staff, and then we'll move forward as a team.

Q. Greg and Terry, going back to the search, in terms of Bill Belichick, how serious of a candidate was he, and you guys met with him twice early on in the process, there were a bunch of reports of breakdowns over maybe how much power he wanted. Where did that kind of maybe fall apart in terms of the level of seriousness when you guys looked at him?

GREG BEADLES: I can start on that. All of our candidates, first of all, were serious. We interviewed 14, three in person, so we had three very experienced veteran coaches that the league allowed us to meet in person, and we preferred meeting in person versus virtual if we could.

Anyone that was under contract to an NFL club we couldn't meet in person until the 22nd. So we had a lot of time before that where we met with Coach Belichick, Coach Harbaugh, Coach Vrabel, who all obviously have a great track record and were excellent interviews.

I think the thing that we came away with and have talked about a number of times afterwards is just the number of fantastic candidates that were out there, and I think Terry mentioned earlier, several of them have already gotten head jobs through this cycle, so probably half the guys that were on our list are out there -- got the jobs that were open.

Coach Belichick was obviously a very serious candidate for us. You can't have anything but the ultimate respect for what he's done in his career.

At the end of the day, it was just what's the best fit for us in the current situation where we are, the current time that we are. Our group was unanimous to Arthur in our recommendation that that was Raheem.

TERRY FONTENOT: Nothing to add. It was an excellent process. You learn a lot when you're going through that process. We're talking to some of the brightest minds in the game, whether it was the coaches that have had success already or coaches that we know are going to

have future success.

It was an excellent process. It was very thorough. You appreciate those times because you learn a lot about the league. You learn a lot about your team, and it's important to go into it with an open mind and with humility, so you can actually listen and learn.

I appreciated all those. I know we appreciated all those interviews and appreciated the time, and we're thankful for it, and we're excited about the result.

Q. Raheem, you had talked about your coordinators, and one thing that is noticeable if I'm correct is neither one of them has called plays on the NFL level before. Was that a concern when you were hiring the coordinators, and also, are you going to be calling the defensive plays or is Jimmy going to do that?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know, it wasn't a concern because of the knowledge and the knowledge base from the coordinators that we've gotten here both, and I've got full confidence in both of those guys having the ability to do it.

I've been around Zac Robinson in certain situations where he's been able to call actual NFL games, whether they be preseason or not, but it's more about the confidence, the flow, how you get it out there, the ability to do those things, and then obviously Jimmy has called it for a long time in the college game.

I don't see a lot of confidence struggle issues that he'll have calling it at this next level, so I'm really confident in both of those guys having the ability to do that.

Myself personally, I want Jimmy Lake to get out there and be able to be in front, calling the plays, and me being able to be on both sides of the ball so I can really be involved in how we handle situations, how we go about our game management, all those type of things, so you can be the entirety of the head coach and control the football team the way you want to control it.

Got some real thoughts behind that. I can get into depth on how I feel about those things with you, but really got a lot of confidence in those two men calling the game.

There's other ways to train people within practice and how you go about your business when you do live periods and stuff like that, when you compete, so we'll get plenty of time to do those things, and that's all a part of getting better.

There was a time that I didn't call a play, and I was able to go out there and do those things just based on how you

train and how you develop and how you grow.

That's some of the cool experiences that you have when you do this thing, when you're talking about the people that you want to bring in.

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