

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Kirk Cousins

Weekday Press Conference



KIRK COUSINS: I'll open and then I can take any questions you have.

Absolutely thrilled to be an Atlanta Falcon. Our family, my wife's family have so many ties to Georgia, the great city of Atlanta, and we're so excited to be here.

I've spent six off-seasons here training and being in the city, so it feels like home. It's been home away from home for so many years now. It certainly is home for my wife.

We were married here in Roswell. Our younger son Turner was born in downtown Atlanta on Ted Turner Drive. There's a reason he's named Turner. Our first date was at Stone Mountain. I've frequented the Hartsfield airport more than I would care to admit and battled traffic through downtown many, many times.

It's fun to be here and now be a part of the sports scene here. I've observed it from a distance for so long and now to be a part of it is a real honor.

I was in the Georgia Dome for the last two games played there by the Falcons in the playoffs after the '16 season against Seattle and Green Bay and remember watching those games and taking in that moment. It's really a goal of mine to revisit that moment again as a player here, and that's really the dream.

I've already been calling teammates and getting to know coaches and trying to catch up on lost time, and that's really where the work now begins, trying to build continuity, because that's the one thing we really don't have right now is the continuity. That's where we've got to get.

That'll be what the next several weeks, several months are for, and can't wait to start attacking that.

I really believe as I looked around at opportunities for me in free agency that when the coach told me this when I was a young player in the league, a coach who I have a lot of respect for, he said, when the owner, general manager,

head coach and quarterback are on the same page, that's when you really have a chance to go win a Super Bowl.

As I looked at the Atlanta Falcons, I believe strongly that the owner, head coach, general manager and quarterback can all be on the same page, and that's exciting for me. It's why I'm thrilled to be here.

With that, I'll open it up for any questions you have.

Q. What made you decide here over Minnesota? Were there any other teams that --

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, there was a lot of conversations in a short amount of time. It goes fast. That's the way free agency works.

I think in Minnesota, it was trending over the last couple off-seasons to be somewhat year to year, and as we talked with Atlanta, it felt like this was a place where if I play at the level I expect to play that I can retire a Falcon, and that was something that really excited me. That's certainly the goal.

You've got to earn the right to do that, but that was exciting to feel like I could get that opportunity here.

Q. How did this deal come together?

KIRK COUSINS: Great question. I stayed pretty passive through the process. I've learned through the years that you hire an agent, you let the agent do his job, you let the teams do their homework. You make yourself available, but I was pretty much out of it. I was in Michigan and taking my son Turner to his fifth birthday party and just trying to kind of live my off-season life and let the business take care of itself. I was pretty passive through the process, and I'm thrilled where it ended up.

Q. Can we get a medical update?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, yeah, I'm feeling great. This is my first surgery of my life, so the rehab process has certainly been a first for me.



It's really been up and to the right for the first four months. It's been a really positive process. I've enjoyed the rehab. The Vikings' staff was phenomenal getting me through the acute stage. Chad Cook, who's full time with me as a body coach, has really helped carry that load since the season ended and done a great job.

Now I'm excited to jump in with the Falcons and with their training room and their training staff and get going.

I'm optimistic that I can be full speed at practice before we break for the summer, and that's kind of the goal I've set for myself, but we do have a long runway, and what I've been told going back to when I first injured it, it was that you don't rush it, you let time do its thing, and it's going to take time to fully heal that tissue, but as a competitor, you want to get back as fast as you can, and certainly I'm trying to do that.

Q. Do you have to in some ways be more cautious on it? You're in your mid-30s, and our bodies heal a little bit slower these days. Do you have to be more cautious and try to be smarter with it than maybe you would have been 10 years ago?

KIRK COUSINS: No, I don't think so. I think you just respect the process and you're diligent and thorough. The tissue will heal as it heals. You listen to your body.

I think as an athlete you're used to having to work through things and know how your body is handling day-to-day activity. It's been a positive process. I expect it to continue to be.

We've just got to take it one day at a time has kind of been the phrase I keep saying since I got hurt, and we'll keep doing that.

Q. Can you put a percentage on where it is strength-wise and also just give us some indication on what you're able to do now versus say a month ago and your progress?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, I don't think I can put a percentage on it. It wouldn't be a helpful enough number for me to give you.

But I do think that I can take drops. I can play the quarterback position, if you will, throwing the football.

I think the minute I would have to leave the pocket is where you would say, yeah, he's still recovering from an achilles, but taking drops, making throws, that's really no problem at this point.

Q. What was the situation in terms of passing a physical? Was there any apprehension about that?

KIRK COUSINS: No, I think certainly the physical was outside of the achilles, everything else passed as expected, and then obviously the achilles doesn't pass right now, and then you expect to here in the next few months.

Q. You talked about the owner, the general manager, the head coach being on the same page. How did those others earn your trust to sign and seal this deal?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, I think in this league when you've been in it 12 years, you learn about people without having necessarily directly been around them. You can certainly do your homework, as well. Raheem I was around for two years in Washington and was just so impressed with him as our DB coach. He would walk down the hall to the quarterback meeting in OTAs, and I was a rookie and didn't know what was normal, but that wasn't normal for me before that and wasn't normal after. But for a DB coach to walk down the hall and -- now looking back when that room was Kyle Shanahan, Matt Lafleur, Mike McDaniel, Sean McVay, he had good reason to be walking down the hall, but I would put him right in that category.

As I look back, I think he was one of the original people there in the room with those other names, and the fact that I was in that room, too, the chance to get back with someone from that room was a real thrill for me.

I called Drew Brees, and I said, Drew -- I can't talk to teams, but I can talk to you, and you worked with Terry for 15 years. Talk to me about him. Drew just raved about him, about his football knowledge. I think it shows in the roster he's already built here.

Then then also got a lot of positive feedback on Mr. Blank, and I just started putting the pieces together the best I could, and I really like what I was learning.

Q. You mentioned the roster. What are the strengths of this roster offensively as you see them?

KIRK COUSINS: Well, I see playmakers on the outside. I see an offensive line that's talented, that's played together, that's well-coached. I see good people. You win with people. I just see really good people who want to do things the right way. They want to put the work in. They want to be coached.

I'm just thrilled to be able to be a part of this group and to go chase a common goal together. I do see a lot of ability.

Q. The staff has talked a lot about what they want in a quarterback, proven starter, they named several things. Raheem talked about wanting a guy that fits Atlanta, the culture of Atlanta. I know you list all of the connections you have here, but what would you say to Falcons fans that you fit this culture because they're looking for that guy to come in here and play the way they want the Falcons to play?

KIRK COUSINS: No doubt. My father-in-law wants the Falcons to play the way they know the Falcons can play, and I sat there on a couch next to him on a bye week as he cheers for the Falcons to play that way.

I think you have to be process-oriented, you've got to be hardworking, you've got to be a great leader, you've got to serve your teammates, you've got to build relationships. Those are all the things I'm trying to do. It's a formula that has worked for me since my junior year of high school when I first began this football journey being recruited. I'm going to be the same guy I've been through that whole process, and I believe that what's gotten me here to this point will serve me well up ahead.

You don't do it alone. You've got to do it with the people around you. That's why when you get here and you look around, you think, boy, there's great people here, and it's not just the football team. I'm looking at the support staff, yesterday calling our head athletic trainer, talking to our head of PR, I'm thinking, we've got good people here. That's exciting to be a part of.

Q. You mentioned being passive, fairly passive in the process. I wonder at what point do you step in and start making the decision, and what's the final factor in that decision?

KIRK COUSINS: There is no final factor. I think it's multifactorial. I think you've got a lot going on. I think it goes quickly. I think the decisions somewhat make themselves. You just observe what doors are opening and what doors are closing. That kind of helps inform you to make a decision.

Q. What's the timeline of when that decision was made? When did you know you were leaving Minnesota, and when did you know you were going to Atlanta, if those are two different?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, I think my agent called -- I was getting out of a body work appointment, and my agent called and said basically that I's have been dotted, T's have been crossed. He was ready to put it on social media. He did one last check-in with me, and I said, no, I've been passive through this process to this point, I'm

going to be passive here. I trust you, Mike; we've worked together for over a decade. If you're ready, I'm ready.

At that point, he put it out on social media, and my phone suddenly had 200 text messages.

Then we hit the road shortly thereafter and road tripped from Michigan down here, and that was a time for me to make a lot of phone calls, both saying goodbye and also introducing myself to a lot of people here in Atlanta.

Q. That morning in your mind it could have gone -- when you woke up that morning, it could have been either outcome for you?

KIRK COUSINS: I think so. I think so, and I think that's what the league is. I've learned NFL stands for not for long, and you don't really take anything for granted. You get to work every day, and you're always aware that nothing is promised, nothing is guaranteed.

I don't tend to get too far ahead.

Q. You said all the elements are here to win a Super Bowl. I'm curious what makes you think that those elements are in place, and also for you personally as a guy who's put up some great numbers over the years but only has one --

KIRK COUSINS: It's all about winning.

Q. How much are you driven by wanting to add that to your legacy, that you can win the big game and win in the postseason?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, winning is what it's all about. That really informs so many decisions. Even in recruiting Darnell Mooney to come here, his answer was I just want to win. I said, well, we're on the same page.

That's really where the focus lies. You've got to go prove it in the fall, but you certainly believe that there's the pieces here that you can do that.

Q. Does it bug you that you haven't had that playoff success? Is that kind of hanging over your head, that my career won't be complete until I have a deep run in the postseason?

KIRK COUSINS: I certainly think that quarterbacks will always be evaluated based on not just September to December but January and February. That's where you want to get to because of September to December, and then once you get there, you want to have meaningful wins and play meaningful games in January and February, and



that's where I want to go, and I believe we can go.

Q. Did they come to you with the idea of Mooney or did you go to them?

KIRK COUSINS: Again, pretty passive, let them do their job. You trust them to do their job. But they said, hey, we're close, and I said, well, let me call him, this guy is the real deal. I saw him twice a year in Minnesota in the division, and I'm thrilled we have him.

Q. In terms of this locker room, at least right now you have guys that were starters last year in this locker room. How do you manage that and handle that because I believe this situation you kind of dealt with in the beginning of your career --

KIRK COUSINS: Even at Michigan State I was in a crowded quarterback room with Brian Hoyer, who's played 15 plus years in the league, and Nick Foles, who's been a Super Bowl MVP. We were all in the same quarterback room. In Washington there was competition.

I think you want to have the quarterback room be a working force together regardless of who's in there. That'll never change no matter who's in that room. I want to be available, be a resource, and also iron sharpens iron, be sharpening each other. I think that's what really makes me better as a player is when the quarterback room can help sharpen you.

Q. As a leader, how do you navigate that?

KIRK COUSINS: It's the same way you lead any other room. You build relationships. You make yourself available. You ask questions, be a question asker, and you just understand that we're in this together. We're all trying to help this team win, and we're all trying to get better as quarterbacks.

Q. Have you had a chance to talk to Zac Robinson?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, briefly. I haven't met with him as much as I will up ahead now, but feel really good about him as a play caller leading our offense.

Q. Is it your impression that there would be similarities to what he wants to do and what you were doing in Minnesota?

KIRK COUSINS: I believe there will be. I believe time will tell. I think every coordinator puts their spin on things, so what was similar starts to evolve and change, but I'll be able to be here as we do that.

I'm excited to just get to work and start trying to get this playbook digested, but I'd like to think a lot of the language and a lot of the stuff that can be hard early on will be something that I can plug and play a little faster.

Q. You said that the achilles surgery was the first thing you've ever had, so what did you learn about yourself during this recovery process?

KIRK COUSINS: I think it was healthy seeing the season played from a different perspective, whether that be watching on TV -- the first game was here in Atlanta, I was watching from a couch in Minnesota with my leg up and throwing balls across the basement floor to my son. You have a different perspective, and I think that was healthy. I think watching it from the sideline the last three games of the season also did that.

I think it makes me that much hungrier to get back and to be an even better player and leader when I'm back. Not that I took time for granted, but you certainly will appreciate it more now.

I think all of that were positive takeaways from the injury.

Q. You've talked about it a little bit, but when it comes to the mentality of being in Atlanta at this point in your career, why did it make sense right now for you?

KIRK COUSINS: Well, the opportunity hadn't presented itself previously. If it had, I'm sure we would have been very seriously looking, too. As God's plan would have it, this was the time that aligned, and we're thrilled that it did.

We feel that this is a little bit of a home away from home, and I think that helps with the transition because there is so much to get acclimated to, and the fact that I stayed in my in laws' basement last night like I have for six off-seasons, it's just familiar. It's what you know. I made the drive from Johns Creek up here, and I haven't made the drive to Flowery Branch much but I understand how to get around the perimeter of Atlanta. That's a little unique in the familiarity we have, and I think that's a positive.

Q. How much do you enjoy the fact that there's a lot of young skill players on this roster?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, it's a huge positive. I was so enjoying just calling them yesterday on my drive, talking to Kyle Pitts and Drake London and texting with Bijan and just being able to kind of get to know these guys, Jake Matthews, Kalen McGary. I've got a few more guys to call, but just seemed like really solid people, and can't wait to get to work with them.

Q. Have you talked to Kyle about No. 8?

KIRK COUSINS: He actually texted me about it, and I said, Kyle, I want to be a good teammate. That's ultimately what I want to be. So I said, if it's a number you want to pivot from, great. You let me know. I obviously have worn No. 8 since high school. If it's a number you'd like to keep, great, no problem, I can find another number. So I just want to be a good teammate, and I do believe it's bigger than Kyle and I. I think the league will start to speak into things, and we'll just see how that all plays out.

He was funny about it. I said, I'll write a check, whatever foundation -- I'm not going to let you just give me the number. I want to make it worth your while, make a donation, whatever it needs to be. He said, I just want targets every game. He was joking. He kind of winked. I joked with him, I said, good answer. Good answer.

We'll see how it all plays out, but it might be bigger than us.

Q. Starting to have these conversations with players, who was the first player to reach out and how did that initial conversation go?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, Kyle probably was the first if I can remember back a few weeks. He was recruiting, and it's always fun to be wanted, so I appreciated that. He did a great job kind of leading the charge.

Q. Going back to what you were saying about the owner, the GM, head coach, quarterback all being aligned and on the same page, in your conversations with that collective group, was there something said or a point where you got to where you were like, I know my goal, my personal identity aligns with the organization?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, great question. I think when you see Mr. Blank's commitment to winning and what he's done over the years to make the Falcons a first-class organization, when you see the players that Terry has drafted, when you see his experience with the Saints and what they've built over many years and the success he's been around, and then I knew Raheem and when I see what he's done and he's been around and the people he's led and the people who have worked with these people speaking to highly of them, the evidence was just mounting to show that this is some serious alignment here.

Q. You're famous for your swag and the chains and --

KIRK COUSINS: Or lack thereof maybe.

Q. Do you feel like that'll fit in with the city? Will we

continue to see that side of you?

KIRK COUSINS: Let's hope. You've got to win. Chains aren't very funny when you're losing so you've got to win football games. But when you win football games, I expect the city to see the fullness of my personality, the full force of my personality when we win, and I think our team and my history, the teams I've played on, will feed off that. It will be great energy. But you've got to win to do that. You don't just force that without earning it on the field.

Q. Going off that, Quavo actually said there's plenty of chains here and nicknamed you Kirk Frost. Do you like that nickname?

KIRK COUSINS: I love the nickname. If it's coming from Quavo, great, I'll roll with whatever the locker room wants. So I'm going to lean into it and have fun. We've got to win football games, and I think the rest will be gravy.

Q. Based on that and the conversations you've shared with us with the other players that you've reached out to and the coaches, is there one moment or conversation you look back on over the last 48 hours, whatever it's been, I know it's been crazy, that you look at and you say, that's why I'm really excited to come here?

KIRK COUSINS: Man, it was so many. My wife is riding shotgun, my boys are watching Disney+ in the backseat as we're driving, and I'm kind of trying to do the dad thing with one arm and drive with the other. But I kept getting off a call, whether it was with Jake Matthews, whether it was with the team chaplain, whether it was with Ryan Pace, whether it was with McGary, whoever, Drake London. I said, Julie, these guys are sharp. I've been in locker rooms. I've seen what it can look like. I said, these guys are sharp, well-spoken, they want to win, they're humble. I mean, this could be fun.

I always am cautious because I say, we've got to put the work in. When we don't have right now is continuity. What we don't have is continuity, so we have to make up for lost time, learn the system, spending time together. Not just on the football field but off the football field spending time together.

We need to build continuity. That's got to be intentional. It's got to be more than just what the NFL allows us to do on the field. We've got to be intentional outside of that time and make up for lost time. So that's really where my focus will be the next couple months.

Q. You mentioned that you were in the Georgia Dome for those last playoff games. Those are the last playoff



games this franchise has hosted. Does that dawn on you, the fact that this organization has just not been in those situations for such a long period of time, and how do you deal with that pressure knowing that you're kind of the guy who's tabbed to help you lead them back there?

KIRK COUSINS: Well, I think every year is a new year. The league kind of resets. I learned when we went 13-4 and then we lost in the playoffs, you don't get to go to OTAs somehow with some kind of head start because you were 13-4. You go to OTAs like every other team. The team that went 4-13 starts in the same place you do. Every year you reset.

For some teams, that's a positive, for some teams that can be a challenge. But I look forward to the group we have resetting here in a couple weeks, getting together and getting to work, and just building it one day at a time and certainly trying to get back to hosting home playoff games and winning home playoff games just like they did that year at the end of 2016 when I was able to watch it happen and see what the Georgia Dome felt like and the energy that was there. Absolutely want to get back to that.

Q. You mentioned continuity. What are the steps you take to build that continuity? What are the benchmarks you're looking for?

KIRK COUSINS: I think it's everything from getting in the training room and getting around the trainers, rehabbing the achilles, seeing the other guys who are in there getting their body work done, building relationships with them in there to meeting with coaches, going over the system, asking questions about fundamentals, tape, watching tape. I want to watch tape not only -- I want to see Drake London, I want to see every catch he's had in the league so far. I want to see every catch he had at USC his final year there. I want to watch Kyle Pitts the same way, I want to watch Bijan the same way. I want to study these guys, and I want to do it with them, and I want to make a cut-up and say, Drake, I watched this from your days at USC, tell me about this route, tell me about this play. You think this is a strength of yours, how do we work on this. I want to put the work in, put the hours in with these guys, be intentional and believe that if we do that, we're going to like where we are as we move forward.

But that doesn't just happen. We've got to plan these meetings, watch this film, spend time in this building, and put in the work to where we get to September and can confidently say we haven't been together for years but the goal is that we can play like we have, and that's what we're trying to work towards. It's going to take some work.

Q. What was that first conversation like trying to get you here?

KIRK COUSINS: I was walking through Disney World, and I think I was in Epcot in line for Guardians of the Galaxy and I get a text from an unknown number, and it's, Kirk, this is Kyle Pitts, how are you. I said, I'm doing good, Kyle. I think I knew where the text was going but he didn't say yet. He said, we're ready for you to take us to the promised land.

I said, well, let's talk. It just kind of was him recruiting a little bit, and it was good to make the introduction.

Q. Did he actually call you Kirko?

KIRK COUSINS: I don't remember. I could pull it up if I had it. Most people do, actually. Most people that text me it's Kirko or anything but Kirk usually.

Q. When did you first see him play?

KIRK COUSINS: The Pro Bowl after the '21 season in Vegas he was at the Pro Bowl, and obviously the game back then was played at about half speed so you weren't quite able to see his ability, but there were a couple times with his height you'd throw him a fade route or a slant and you could see the size of the target that he is, and you think, boy, this guy could be pretty dangerous.

Q. Any other times?

KIRK COUSINS: Early, I'm not sure about that early, but in the last couple days I've heard from a lot of guys, yeah.

Q. You talk about this drive that you made over the past couple of days. How long was that drive, and how much of that drive was on the phone with people?

KIRK COUSINS: Yeah, my wife would tell you the whole time. I had my phone to my ear on speaker most of the time. I don't know what it was hours-wise. We ended up taking our time. We stayed overnight in Indianapolis, we stopped at the Noah's Ark Encounter in Kentucky and then we continued on and visited an old teammate in Knoxville, so we broke it up. Like I said, the boys had a lot of Disney+ going on in the back.

A great time to make calls and get acquainted with people. There's a lot more to go still up ahead.

Q. (Indiscernible) at this point in your career just to want it, that people are reaching out to you, come play here?

KIRK COUSINS: No, it means a lot. It's a privilege to be the quarterback for the Atlanta Falcons. This is a privilege. My father-in-law -- I've watched him borderline out loud praying watching games, not just the Falcons but the Braves and the Hawks. He loves this. I set there in the off-seasons in February on the couch at night watching these teams play, watching these games and seeing how much it means to him. You realize, man, it is a privilege to get to play for a team with people like that cheering for you, and what you want to do is understand there's a responsibility that comes with that privilege. You're accountable to a lot of people.

You've got to deliver. That's where I say we've got to get to work, because I understand that and can't wait to do that, and when you can deliver, it's special. I have a vision of where we can go, but you don't get there tomorrow. You've just got to -- tomorrow I've got to get in and start rehabbing my achilles and just take that next step every day, but certainly as I'm driving up here taking stock of things, I feel very privileged and fortunate that I have a responsibility now that comes with that, and so can't wait to be able to do this for a city that I've been able to be sort of accepted by over the last several years just because we do life here so much in the off-seasons, and now to officially be a part of it, I'm thrilled.

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