

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Coach Raheem Morris GM Terry Fontenot Draft Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: Being able to add Michael Penix Jr., when you can add a high caliber player like that, with his intangibles, those tools, he's a winner. Very excited. You don't pass up that opportunity.

And Kirk Cousins is our quarterback. We're very excited about Kirk, very excited about this team. And Michael Penix is -- we're talking about the future. The draft is, you look at the future and you look at big picture. But we are very excited about that quarterback room. And, again, Kirk is our quarterback but adding Michael Penix is thinking about the future.

Q. What impressed you all on the April 5th visit? He told us he met with you all at the combine, and it was a pretty tough meeting for him. But how did the April 5th presentation go, workout go?

TERRY FONTENOT: Every exposure with Penix we're very excited about it. Look, you look at his history. He's been through some things through his career. The injuries he went through earlier in his career and being able to bounce back and do the things he did at the University of Washington.

But every exposure going into this process, and getting to go out there and see him in person, that's really important to us, to be able to really get around him and spend more time with him. And we take advantage of every exposure.

Q. How do you all balance the, hey, here's a good quarterback here and some defenders were available, and a receiver went right after your pick? How did you all balance the players that were available to you at eight?

RAHEEM MORRIS: It was pretty simple for us. When you get Kirk Cousins and you talk about short-term winning, talk about winning right now, which we know we want to be in a position to do, we won't have the ability to be picking

this high again with the guy that we got. And these guys go off the board pretty quickly.

And we thought it would be important for us to address our future quarterback right now while we're picking this low in these moments and to be able to move forward. Fortunately enough for us we've got Kirk Cousins in the building, we've got a guy that can go out there and win football games.

We should picking high enough -- we talk about winning the South, talked about doing some of these things, that includes going to the playoffs. You just seen six quarterbacks go off the board before the 12th pick of the draft. And we don't want to be picking down there anymore. Terry's done a nice job getting us some really good players, quality players. And we don't want to be back in that position.

So, let's move forward and think about the future and address that right now. We're in a position to win. We put ourselves in a position to win. These guys did a great job doing that. That helped us make that decision and it made it pretty definitive in our building for us tonight and how we wanted to move tonight and today with that moving that way.

TERRY FONTENOT: There's still a lot of good defensive players on the board, and we're excited at this point to have three picks tomorrow. And we'll make sure we continue to add to this team. Not just good defensive, there's still good offensive players on the board. We'll add some good players in this draft.

Q. What would you say to a fan or season ticket holder who hasn't seen this team in the playoffs since 2017, to be thinking about the future as opposed to you can have taken your pick of any (indiscernible) player on the board?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's who we're thinking about when we make decisions like this -- the most important position in football. That's why we did everything we could do to get Kirk Cousins. And to tell you that now we did everything we could to get Kirk Cousins; we're excited



about him. And now we added Michael Penix Jr.

That's who we're thinking about when we make -- these are not easy decisions, they're tough decisions. That's who we're thinking about. We're thinking about the fans and this organization. We're going to build a sustained winner, and we're going to win for a long time. That's the most important position in football.

That's what we're thinking about. But this roster building process, we have a lot left in this draft. We're going to add some good players. We have a lot of confidence in that. Even as we get out of this draft, 24/7, 365, we're going to continue to build this team.

Q. If I can follow up with one more with that same line of thinking, would this have been as important to address this with this pick if not for the fact that this quarterback, he'll be 36 and coming off a serious injury?

TERRY FONTENOT: We're excited about where Kirk is. We're confident in him and everything he's going to do for us. Again, we're thinking more long term for this. Very, very excited about Kirk. That has not changed. This is thinking about the future.

RAHEEM MORRIS: It's nothing to do with the injury. If we were fortunate enough, we talked about it to have Kirk with his 12th year career with us, we could still be in that position potentially going to get our quarterback, or the quarterback of the future.

And that's the nature of the beast. We were lucky enough to watch Matt Ryan play 14 years, I believe 13 of them with the Atlanta Falcons. At some point you have to find a way to have that succession plan in place. It just so happened it posed itself tonight. And with the guy we have, the guy that we got and the guy we (indiscernible) coming back, we don't want to be in this position again to pick that guy again.

TERRY FONTENOT: We won't be.

Q. There can be a tension in this league between the front office, who, Terry's job is to build and think three years out. You were hired with the expectation that this roster was ready to win now. So do you feel, is there a pull from your position to not do something that's ostensibly going to help your team immediately?

RAHEEM MORRIS: I don't think there's ever a tension when you're thinking about winning or long-term winning. I think our job is to win long term and immediately. And our job all plays in together. When you say that, he has

addressed the immediate future going out and getting Kirk Cousins gets us in position to win. Going out and getting the (indiscernible) that we address our roster with. Getting some of the veterans we had to get in free agency.

And we still have tomorrow. We still have the next day to keep improvement to our roster. To say there would be a retention or a divide based on that I think those are well calculated guess and thought out by us for decisions made to get what's best for our football team. I think we did tonight.

Q. To Raheem's point about succession plan, when you kind of think back to the position you're in in 2021 with Matt Ryan, how much does that decision and the effects of the last two seasons alter your own thinking about a succession plan with Kirk Cousins?

TERRY FONTENOT: I understand the question. It's a good question. Every draft is different. And every draft is completely different. That's some drafts you just saw these quarterbacks go. There's some drafts where not many quarterbacks go. Couple drafts go one quarterback went in the first round. You saw the quarterbacks in the first round. These drafts are different.

Next year can be different. That's why you have to, when you have a lot of belief in a player, you can't pass that up. So it wasn't so much that we went to the draft and said hey, because of previous we have to make sure we have this in place. Because if we weren't staring at Penix there, we weren't going to reach and force something.

This wasn't us forcing something. It's just that we had a lot of belief in the player and we know he could be a future franchise player. That's why we made the decision to do that right now.

If it wasn't him, if it weren't (indiscernible) or other guys would have went, we weren't going to try to reach or force something. This is we're very excited about where we are now. But if there is a player we believe in we're going to take them.

Q. What is it specifically about Michael that makes you feel that way?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Really a lot of the same similar traits we talk about when we got Kirk Cousins. You're talking about a guy who is a pocket passer, who can progress really well, who can do all the things you want him to do, throw the ball all over the field. We're talking about a player who can come in and learn from a play we just picked up and really be behind them. Really see the right way, see it modeled the right way. Be in the building the

same time.

All those things we talked about when we signed Kirk are a lot of the things we saw on tape from Michael that we love, the live arm, the ability to go out there and play, the ability to be healthy the last two years and really be successful in Washington. We love the fight in the kid. We loved the interactions that we had with him throughout the process. Everything that came into place for that type of thing.

So we're really excited about the man. We're really excited about our plan. Really excited about the people we have in our building, particularly Kirk and knowing that he's going to get modeled the right way with the guy we have.

Q. For Terry or Raheem, whichever one of you called Kirk, when you're on the clock to tell him about it, what was his reaction?

TERRY FONTENOT: That's a private -- we wouldn't share that.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Reactions are pretty private. He got called on the clock obviously because the sensitive time with the issues that you have going on. It's never a right time to talk to a quarterback about those things. And reactions will always be private when it comes to those things, unless Kirk decides to tell you some of the those things, whatever the case might be. But he's a competitor, just like us all. And you can always expect those things to go the way you think.

Q. His agents have been telling us they were shocked and dismayed, that they were informed on the clock --

RAHEEM MORRIS: Yes.

Q. I think the conventional wisdom in a developmental quarterback that you are going to use in the future, maybe you use a third- or fourth-round pick and you hope that they improve. Has your perspective on how to staff the position changed over the years in terms of wanting to go full bore in terms of allocating this top draft capital?

TERRY FONTENOT: You could say third-, fourth-round pick if there's somebody who you really believe in in the third or fourth round. But you can see, six quarterbacks went in the first round. There's a reason.

It's not easy to do in this position. And when you really study the drafts and the history, there's years that there's none that there's years that there's a couple. And so when you look at really the history.

So at the end of the day, if you believe in a player at that position, because if we're all sitting here a few years from now, whenever it is, and this guy's playing pretty good for somebody regardless of the situation, regardless you sit back and look back and we pass them up, you can't do it.

If you believe in a quarterback you have to take him. And if he sits for four or five years, that's a great problem to have, because we're doing so well at that position. It's just as simple as if you see a guy that you believe in at that position you have to take him.

Q. How do you coach Mike coming into this position? How do you integrate him? What's his role going to be with the team?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You get him in. He's got a great guy he can model his game after. He has a great guy he can model his process after. He's got a great guy he can model everything about Kirk Cousins is absolutely phenomenal, from when he came into the league and until now.

And he's in a position where he can just go follow and do the right things within our building and learning the structure of the offense. Put himself in position to go out there try to be the best version of himself. And that's all he needs to do, just be the best version of himself for us.

Q. How did you all square the medicals with his early part at Indiana, the two knees and shoulders, the fact that he was healthy the last couple of years how did the medical reports come back with his hip.

TERRY FONTENOT: That's all part of it. We looked at all the history. Again, our trainers and doctors, we spent a lot of time with him going through that process. And it does mean a lot that he's played well these last two years. Obviously it's something we're always forward-thinking on in terms of doing everything we can to prevent injuries. But we felt good about it?

Q. At what point did he maybe this whole thing kind of -- you're so convicted in this choice -- so at what point did he really sell himself to you guys? Was it that visit in Seattle? What did he maybe do or say that you guys were, wow, this is our guy? I know last year you guys were talking about Bijan when you went to the barbecue place and that whole visit (indiscernible) that solidified. When was it with Michael?

TERRY FONTENOT: Every step of the process. The boots on the ground scouts, they're first level. And they go through their gathering all the information and we get the scouts' grades and reports. And then as you get out of the

season the coaches get involved and we continue to go through that process.

And then you've got the all-star games, the combine. There's all these different levels. We do a lot of work into it. I wouldn't say there's one magic moment. It's just going through the whole process. And as you continue to work through the draft and then we look at what's there. And when he was sitting there staring at us at eight, we weren't going to pass it up.

Q. How do these two quarterbacks balance each other in a way you're confident they can learn and grow and be confident in each other?

RAHEEM MORRIS: It's his responsibility to learn from Kirk, and you're talking about a guy who's had a lot of success in the National Football League. He's lacking about a young man coming to the league. He's going to be hungry, eager to learn and have a certain desire that it takes to sit back and learn.

I watched Kirk do it. Now it's Michael's time to do it. You can't put that on Kirk. Kirk's job is just to be a professional. Kirk will show him the way by how he goes about his business every single day. And Michael will get a chance to see that firsthand. And I think that's a really good thing for the young player.

Q. Do you see that willingness to learn and be patient during these in-person meetings?

RAHEEM MORRIS: For me I saw the willingness to learn from when you're coaching him throughout the workout, when you have an ability to talk to him within the Zoom conversations that our coaches have with him. When you have the ability to go through the process and watch him go through his whole career, where he was at and where he came from and things he had done.

It excites us to add a guy of his caliber, to add a guy that we felt could be our future, like you said, you don't know what round it's going to come in. They come in in all types of rounds for us.

For us it started happening quicker and faster. And the Green Bay model was something we talked about. It's been proven to be right last year. So hopefully we'll be right with them.

Q. Quarterback still sitting there, a lot of speculation watching the draft that other teams might be interested in possibly moving up right around your spot. Can you speak on what kind of interest you had when your spot came up?

TERRY FONTENOT: We had a lot of communications about moving back and we talked a lot of teams just preliminary talks to assess, but we didn't have some -- we didn't get a big offer to give up a lot. That wasn't there. Again, we're in communication, but there weren't any offers to come up, any significant offers to come up to our spot.

Q. Just to follow up on the Green Bay model.

TERRY FONTENOT: You know that, don't you.

Q. Kind of got it right here. They were taking guys in the fourth and the fifth and the sixth, A-Rod in the first --

RAHEEM MORRIS: A-Rod and Jordan in the first.

Q. So it's more of the latter part.

TERRY FONTENOT: Yes.

Q. Not the Craig (indiscernible) and (indiscernible)?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Tells what year you are. You went back on me. I was speaking more to the previous model, you know, the model when they took Love. And think of that nature, and think of putting the succession plan in the building when it wasn't a popular choice by anybody, by the fans, by clearly the writers and some of those things.

But I think you've got to trust your process. You've got to trust your evaluations of the players. I think you've got to be really convicted in the people that you put in place to evaluate the people.

I think once you do those things, you know, along with Terry's people, along with our people on the coaching side, you collaborate, get into the rooms and you talk about those things, you talk about where you're going to move forward and how you're going to move forward, it doesn't lose any conviction, and in the guys that you have in your room like a Kirk Cousins, you have full conviction in those guys to winning the south, going out taking the south and all the things as a team, all those things still stand in place. But at some point, you know, I wish we all can play forever but we can't.

If things are going right, things are going right, we'll be happy in Atlanta, and we'll be moving forward with Kirk and we'll see what happens. But we've got five years before we gotta make those decisions based on the timing that you pick these guys and the timing they go out.

Like we said, man, things have moved up. It's a little



different than it used to be when you could take a third-round quarterback and you can let those guys mature and grow into potential starters, it's a little bit different timing, little different world. Like I said earlier like I said earlier, I'm hoping and you're hoping that we're not in position to pick quarterbacks because we're not going to pick them low enough. If we can get to that realm, we'll be talking about the stuff we want to play with, the gas we want to play with and how we want to play.

Q. What do you say to the people that they saw the Michigan game, and then another group that saw him in the Big Ten and people watching a lot more Pac-12 last year maybe because of Coach Prime and saw what he did against Oregon and a lot of the third and six touchdowns and saw what he could do, just his whole body of work, can you address that?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Talking about Michael? We got a lot of conviction on Michael. You can go watch where he got tore down in that championship game versus Michigan, where it didn't go as well. We can watch the Texas game where he lights out, but you can watch the body of work throughout the season and the processor and you can watch him go about his business, how he learns, grows, how he makes decisions and makes it happen, there will still be a learning curve when you come to the National Football League.

There's going to be some things he'll be asked to do that he wasn't asked to do in college that he can learn. I just think this is the perfect situation for him.

I think with the guy that we have, the man we have, obviously it's not going to be this happy feeling of emotions that people wanted to be right away, but this is a business. These guys are professionals. We are professionals. We love each other and we are competitive.

So I believe we'll get this thing to work together and we'll get this thing working the right way and we'll get it the way we need to get it done.

Q. Scouting-wise, was there enough underneath stuff because everybody could see the bombs, was there enough underneath stuff that you all say that could get translated to the pro game?

RAHEEM MORRIS: The wow obviously is up top. The wow is up top, when you see him throw the ball on the field, the pylons, see the field posts, see some of those type of throws. But the progression of the player, watching him go from up top to being progressed to the low cross, progressed to downhill, to checkdowns and doing some of those things, some of the things that obviously that you

love about the player.

He's playing a professional game at a very high level. His coordinator is now in the professional game from what he did from last year.

I don't know how to express the fact that we're excited about his ability, but we're in a great position because we have a guy. And you want to put yourself in the position to get a guy when you got a guy, and that seems to be the new formula, the new style and the way we want to go about our business.

I thought Terry did a nice job of working the draft, trying to figure out when it can happen, what's going to happen, how we're going to do it, and that's teaming up and doing that thing together, that's not going to change based on a few plays that didn't go the way that you think it can go based on the ability to coach some of the things that you can do better.

Q. On line media is shocker, stunning. Doesn't seem you guys are shocked or stunned. How do you parse the reaction with what you guys saw and what you know?

TERRY FONTENOT: I guess you understand. You have all the mock drafts, and wherever they come from and the mock drafts and people having expectation of what you're going to do and usually people expect it to pretty much go like that but we have a very detailed process as we go through it.

We have a lot of people that work really hard. And, again, we have a long way to go in this draft. We're very excited, and we're going to definitely get some defensive players, some other offensive players, and we're very excited about it.

But I think sometimes people have an expectation of what they expect to happen and so sometimes it goes the other way, but when we make decisions like this, again, we're thinking about this organization. We're thinking about these fans. We're thinking about the people here. And this is a decision -- we have a lot of belief in this player. Again, that's why we're very aggressive in free agency and we made sure we did whatever we could do to get Kirk Cousins and we worked hard to do that because we know we're going to win a lot of games with Kirk and we're very excited about that. And when you're staring at a quarterback that we have a lot of belief in in the college game, you take advantage of it.

Q. Wanted to ask about Penix's age. He's the older prospect. Turns 24, I think, next week, couple of

weeks from now. If all goes according to plan with Kirk, he's not going to play for three, maybe four years. You talk about 27, 28. You're not going to have much game from him playing against starters. Is it a risk in that regard as far as him sitting for so long when he's an older prospect.

TERRY FONTENOT: It's kind of interesting. In this draft we're starting to see more of the older prospects. I know we have the COVID year in there but also guys we're starting to see a little bit more of that. Guys that are staying in college a little bit longer, but that's not an issue, to answer your question.

We have a lot of confidence in him. And, look, the way he plays the game and we feel really good about that. Not concerned about his age in a negative way.

Q. Raheem, how do you see him fitting into Zach's offense? What is it about his game that you think is a good match and also just the question, does left-handedness matter?

RAHEEM MORRIS: I'll go with the first part of the question first. Obviously the pocket passer, the National Football League, the difference between college football and the National Football League, the biggest difference, I should say there's a couple, but being able to be a pocket passer which he's shown in college, that's a natural fit for what you want to do. When you're talking about any of these high-profiled offenses we're talking about, we're talking about a pocket passer, for the most part. Whether it be Patrick Mahomes at the very best or whether it be all the great processors we have in our building that we've had, Matt Ryan, whatever it's been, the pocket passing ability of him is something that really stands out. I would say why he would fit into our offense, Zac Robinson's offense and the Atlanta Falcons offense just in general. But the left-handed thing is definitely something you would change up a couple of different things.

You mentioned the blindside change. You mentioned some of those things. You mentioned something that would definitely be part of how you do play-actions, some of those things may be changing a little bit, particularly how you throw, how you roll, how you half roll, how you change the pocket and change the platforms, things of that nature.

But that's something that we're all willing to do. That's something that we all have a little bit of experience with, and we can talk about those things once we get our plan in place on the grass.

Q. Terry, you mentioned at the beginning it was tough. Why was it tough? Was it because you kind of knew

there was going to be a certain reaction, I guess, knowing that you could have taken some --

TERRY FONTENOT: No, I guess what I was trying to say this was a business, right? So the tough part is obviously you're not going to always please everybody. You just said it. There's fans that can say okay why would you do this, why would you do that? Because you do.

So we have to think about what's best for this franchise, what's best for this team, but sometimes there's some decisions you make that there can be some. So that's the tough part, I guess, it's a business. But we know that this is going to be -- we're going to be really excited about this decision, and we are very excited about this decision.

And even though right now in the moment you can look at why another quarterback, but we are very excited about the quarterback we signed in free agency and we just drafted one, too. We're excited about it.

Q. Raheem, as a coach what have you learned about Michael in his journey? The Players Tribune story, which I'm sure you read, he talked about not only his injuries but being told at the very start that he was not good enough to play in the SEC and that's why he went to Indiana he had something to prove there. He's come back from adversity in different ways.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Something about two guys we had in the building, second-guessed, been doubted, always proving people wrong.

Kirk is no different with that story. And Michael Penix's story sounds very similar. There's something about people that can go through adversity and people who can handle adversity and people who can literally bounce back from all different types of walks of life and be here.

I'm no different. I've been a head coach before. I failed at it. I've gotten an opportunity to bounce back from it. I want to make the most out of it. Those two players, they represent that at the highest way, and Michael Penix would be no different.

And what we're talking about with people dealing with adversity, dealing with adversity in the sport. To piggyback off Terry, it's tough to make those decisions because of the people and because of that want to and because of that will that we're talking about, you're talking about, the fighting will that Michael Penix had to get to this point. Nothing different than our starting quarterback Kirk Cousins.

That's why you feel the empathy for all those guys because



you know what this is, you know how this goes. And I think somebody mentioned, how do you manage the fact that he may play for four years -- that would make me feel better watching Kirk Cousins playing for four years because there's some really good things going on around here.

TERRY FONTENOT: That's part of the process. When you have guys with the right makeup and the right humility. He's right, that's what we love about this team, the character of this team and the two guys we're talking about are obviously high-character players.

Q. Will he be in the building tomorrow?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yes. We'll do a presser tomorrow.

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