

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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GM Terry Fontenot Coach Raheem Morris Draft Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: Plays the run, plays the pass, excellent motor, top-notch makeup. We're excited about him, the versatility he brings up front, the player he is.

And then we get to Bralen Trice, outside linebacker. Another versatile player. Tough, instinctive. He can play the run, rush the passer. Powerful, heavy handed on the edge. Excellent motor. (Lost audio) the way he approaches the game.

So two players. We really like the skill sets and we like what they're going to bring on and off the field. So very excited about today's outcome.

Q. Can you talk about the trade (indiscernible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: We're aggressive and we've done that, this is the third year in a row doing that in the second round. We did it last year with Bergeron. Did it the year before with A.K.

Excited about both those picks. The question you ask yourself, you can ask yourself if they're going to be there or not -- obviously you don't have a crystal ball, can't see into the future -- but if you want to be aggressive and you weigh out what you would be giving up to go up, and we believed it was worth it, because we wanted that player and we have a clear vision of what he's going to be for us. And you look at our defensive line and he's the perfect fit for us.

Q. (Inaudible)?

RAHEEM MORRIS: The same. What we really valued was a position (indiscernible) and having the ability to move him around. And to be able to play the end position, play that nose tackle position, being able to play that three-technique position, that's something he did a lot of at Clemson, moved all over the place.

That excites us when you have a guy that has that kind of

position flex, that gives you so many movable parts along with D.O. inside, with Grady inside, to play with those guys, along with some of our guys. I'm talking about Zach and TQ and be able to add those guys (indiscernible), bigger man, strength, power.

And really I'm excited to get him with his coach to teach him how to play with his hands a little better and do those different things (indiscernible). And I'm excited about the coaching the guys to be able to coach him and do some of those things.

Really fired up. Position flex players that provide some youth there that we need and be able to give us a nice versatile piece that we can use all across the board.

Q. (Indiscernible) recommendations on Trice?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Coach Lake was -- I knew you were going to ask those questions, I guessed it upstairs -- Coach Lake was obviously with him. But like Terry will tell you, it's still Terry's turn, but the boots on the ground scouts is where it starts and then it gets to us.

Obviously when he was there, we would ask Lake about the players he had in the building and some of those different things. Joe was the scout for that area. And he brings it back. And we get a little bit more information because of that.

But Jacques Smith does a great job evaluating outside linebackers, the powers, the strength they played with this year. Usually you have to (indiscernible) with the last body of work, and that last body of work generally was not there. But had a chance to see it last year and how it's improved and listen to your scouts and coaches, along with our own evaluation. And we were fired up to get that player as well. But yes the long answer, yes.

Q. (Inaudible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: We didn't know how it was going to -- we basically had the players stacked up, how we saw them. And we had Ruke at the top of that, and that's what we wanted.

But if he goes and other guys go, we could have taken off (indiscernible) the player because you don't want to reach into certain spots. But he was a guy we were really excited about getting.

And the same thing when we're on the clock for the next pick. We had some stacks. And, again, if there's a run at that position and something else we could have went another direction. We didn't go into today saying we have to take defensive players; we want to take good football players that fit our ethos, that fit what we're about, that are going to come and help us play. Those are those types of guys.

Q. Terry, you mentioned being aggressive in trading (indiscernible) the second round. The closer (indiscernible) last night getting in the latter part of the first round?

TERRY FONTENOT: We're trying. We're really trying to do it. We had conversations really as soon as we picked today, we aggressively we caught every team from starting at nine all the way down to 32. And we're really aggressive in doing it. And we were really aggressive in doing it.

RAHEEM MORRIS: So aggressive he made me miss dinner. Sitting watching him and waiting for the trades --

TERRY FONTENOT: When we left here was no food.

RAHEEM MORRIS: They gave you guys burgers. We got nothing, because Terry was trying to trade back in the whole night.

TERRY FONTENOT: We were starving. But to answer your question, we're aggressive. How close were we? We felt there were times we were close. But you have to -- we made some pretty big offers. And when you're going through those trades, there's levels that, okay, you're going to offer this at this levels for these picks. And you have to keep adjusting as you go down.

We got into some deeper conversations with some teams. And it obviously didn't work out, but we're aggressive.

Q. (Inaudible) for an edge possibly?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Again, as we were stacked, the first player we were going in for, yes. And there were a couple of them, a few of them obviously we saw they came off. That's where it started.

But there were some others too, other players we were trying to get in for. We had it stacked up. And we had a

group of guys we were trying really, really hard. Again, we called from nine to 32, and we tried hard.

And didn't work out. But we're still excited about where we are right now, what we've got to this point. And we're excited about getting work tomorrow.

Q. (Indiscernible) Michael's visit go today?

TERRY FONTENOT: It was outstanding. It was great. It was outstanding. I know you guys got to talk to him. It was cool meeting his whole family and you really see and one thing you talk about with guys like him is it really starts with the makeup and who he is as a person.

And then when you meet his family, his parents, his grandparents, when you meet that, then you see where it really comes from, you know. And they did a great job throughout the whole thing.

We said all along that makeup, that character, that's really important. And we know what we have in terms of the character with Kirk and putting them in that room with Kirk and Taylor it's really exciting.

Q. Talking to him today about this is the plan we have for you, this is the way we see it playing out. Are you saving that conversation for later in the process?

RAHEEM MORRIS: No, I did not start talking (indiscernible). Today was for him to enjoy his family, to introduce himself to the city of Atlanta, for him to get here and be with you guys.

And to really get in front of Mr. Blank as well. That was important, those introductory things and all the things he wanted to do. Obviously he had to talk to Kirk the night before, which I thought was a pretty cool outing by both of those guys about the empathy and the humility to talk to each other about what was going to happen and how he talked about his support.

And I thought his family being here was great, for them to meet Terry and myself. And do some of those different things that he didn't do -- obviously he didn't come here on a top 30 visit, so we were able to give him the tour, show him what's going on with the building, all the new things we've got going on, all the support we're getting from the owners, as far as what the instructions are going on, this beautiful room we're sitting in, those kind of things.

Those things from the introductory standpoint was way more important than actually getting into our vision and some of the things right away. He's a guy that's got his head screwed on the right way. And we're very proud of

him the right way. But I can't wait to get him back in the building on a full-time basis when he comes back from rookie mini camp and be with us the rest of the offseason and we'll get a lot of those things done.

Don't need to rush the process, don't need to do those things and get into it in the full dynamic about what you're going to be doing for us in the short term. But he's got a good picture and a good vision for himself right now.

Q. How much of that play (inaudible) if that makes any sense? Because you can't see the future. How is it structured how you want it to go or do you just have to let it --

RAHEEM MORRIS: I think really he said it best today. Putting himself in position to act as if he has to play the next snap because you never know. I think he's already got that kind of mentality in in his head.

And really for all position groups it's got to be that way because you never know. You never know what's going to happen. Like you said, you can't plan but what can you plan for? You can plan as if you're going to do whatever is required of you. I believe that's what he's going to do, that's what we'll ask him to do.

Q. He was in here earlier talking about (indiscernible) and you playing linebacker and some of the drills you did when you guys were out there. What do you remember about that particularly?

RAHEEM MORRIS: The whole workout in itself was generally a fun experience to watch him throw, to see his arm talent. And then for to us put a couple of concepts in to be able to watch him layer the ball, to be able to throw to the intermediates, the check downs and the deeper routes.

And to be the linebacker for him to give him a visual picture of what it looks like, and we had to go over some of those things.

I could hear the ball going over the top of my head. It had peak velocity at times. And sometimes he was able to lay it over the top of me where I couldn't get to it. He had his buddies out there. He said he's always ready to slide and poke. And it was great to watch those guys work together and kind of communicate and have that natural bent (indiscernible) receivers and quarterbacks have, along with the tight end out there with him.

And you can just tell the support he has from the people out there. Jeff Fish came out to see him in the workout. It was a big-time clinic going on so there was a bunch of people walking through. His tackle -- I don't want to mess

his name up; Troy came out also to watch.

And we had a nice bunch of people out there ourselves. So it was a really good atmosphere and to watch him throw the ball in that type of weather because it was kind of a damp rainy-ish type of day. It was pretty cold for us that day for us. We were kind of cold. I didn't want to catch the ball. Sometimes I catch the ball for those guys. I was not doing it that day. But it was a good environment. It was nice to see him go out there and execute any type of environment.

Q. (Inaudible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, it was just a part of the process. Look, we liked him throughout the entire process but that was just another exposure that we really appreciated and thought he did a good job. But it was just a part of the process.

Q. You mentioned you want a succession plan, that that's important. If Michael had been gone at seven, would you still have felt like you wanted a quarterback at that spot, or was this a Penix-dependent situation?

TERRY FONTENOT: No, we wouldn't have reached. To answer your question, we definitely wouldn't reach. If we would he have come out of this draft and not drafted a quarterback, we would have been fine with that.

You never want to reach and force it. And that's really why it was important to do it when you believe in a player because we never want to be in a position where we're trying to force it or you're desperate, so you don't want to force it in any spot.

And that's why if you truly believe in a player, you don't pass him up because they don't always come around, guys that you have that much conviction on and that much belief in and be in a position to take them. Because, again, we're not going to be in that position. And, again, you don't know what's going to be in those drafts. This is a very unique draft in that way.

Q. There were other quarterbacks that were still available after him, but for y'all it was him or we're going to move on to a different path, a different branch of our path?

RAHEEM MORRIS: It would have been a different position. If that play wasn't there based on our boards and based on our conversations and our evaluations, the due diligence we did before, I really appreciate going through the process with Terry, being our first time.

But some real long conversations and thought-out things and you never know what's going to happen. You get all the mocks and things of that nature. But as we know every single year those things change based on who likes who and who likes what and what the mentality of it was.

Our mentality was if you get a chance to get a guy who you feel can be part of the succession plan that we're talking about we were going to try to get him and attack that situation at a high level.

And it was really a luxury for us because of the stuff that our owners had allowed us to do -- go out there and get us a quarterback and get us a guy and our short-term future that can go out, lead us, and get wins. We're still very excited about. And obviously you put a little damper on that mood last night, but that's the nature of our beast. That's the nature of our business is the competitive stuff that happens with the flow.

But I'm fired up about my quarterbacks, all of them, and can't wait to get back to work.

Q. As you're saying yesterday, probably feels (inaudible) -- mentioned the other day about finding a new love. How much of that intel do you use to decide to take to take Penix, quarterbacks, obviously (indiscernible) the pick?

TERRY FONTENOT: You work hard to gather as much information as you can and knowing where you expect players to go, and so you have a lot of those conversations leading up to it because we do weigh that out, if you would trade back, you want to know what's going to be there when you trade back, and then again we use a lot of that intel as we're deciding where we wanted to get and what we would give up to get to certain spots in the draft, just knowing what to expect to be each spot.

Again, you can't have a crystal ball. You can't say exactly what it's going to be. You can't see into the future. But you work hard to gather as much information as you can, get as much intel as you can to try to figure out where are you expecting the players to go.

Q. (Inaudible) the draft last night. First choice if things (inaudible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: The same. We expect --

Q. Where you wanted to go. If everything goes (inaudible) what we really want is to (inaudible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: Well, look, there's so many. When there's seven variables in front of you have -- we knew

what we expected the first couple of picks, first few picks, but after that, you just didn't really know. We had a lot of different conversations about a lot of different outcomes and how we were going to pick in those outcomes, and we did. We weighed all the moving back, if you get a certain offer and you move back, this is who you expect to be there.

So we really didn't know what was going to be there today. We weighed out a lot of different things. Several different outcomes and we were ready for whatever, what the outcome was going to be.

Q. (Inaudible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: Again, we worked on -- there were so many different things that could have happened. So there could have been other players that we were staring at. There was just a lot of different outcomes that could have happened, a lot of different things could have happened. We were prepared for everything.

Q. As far as the (inaudible) I think it was three out of the next four. Did you get a sense of, I think, that round was --

TERRY FONTENOT: That's a really good question, but if you notice, if you see how the draft goes, that usually is how it happens. You see when the run kind of started on receivers and it hit, the run starts on corners and it hits. That's usually how it happens.

Once that run starts, they go. Look, we took Bralen and there's a team after us that was about to take him and all of a sudden, a couple of picks later, Ellis goes and then outside backer.

That's kind of how it goes, usually. Those runs really start and, really, you weigh all those things out. You work through the different scenarios. When you're really convicted on a player and you know the vision and the fit for us and all those things, that's why you go up and get them because you just don't know when that run's going to start.

Q. This is a clip of you --

TERRY FONTENOT: My wife asked me about it. What are we all talking about. And I don't know exactly. We talked so much and had so many conversations and I'm very animated. It's just kind of how I talk. But, first of all, to make it clear, Arthur is very supportive.

He's very supportive going through free agency in regards to Kirk Cousins, an investment we made there. He's very



excited about Kirk.

He's very excited about Michael Penix and doing that. We obviously talk about everything, and he's very, very excited about that. We're fully aligned, and he's fully supportive.

I assume that conversation was, like I said, when we -- as soon as we made that pick, because we had already talked about it, whoever we pick, we're going to try to get another player in that round, whoever we pick today.

As soon as we made the pick, we were talking to every team. There were certain things we were going to give up in certain spots. I was probably telling him, if we're here, we think we can get to here, get this particular player, we're going to have to give up a future 1 and this for that. And if we get to this spot, it's a different category of players. Now we can get it done for this. I was probably talking to them about those particular things.

That's what I would assume, but we have so many conversations. But he's been very supportive and very excited about everything. My wife asked me when I got home, she said what were you and Arthur talking about, what was going on? I said we talk about a lot of things. But he's been great.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Terry talks a lot. He's an information giver. Lays out no matter what we're doing, big playing guy.

Q. I like your description, the amount of -- I know one wants to talk about, (inaudible) different coming off the bench, when you're on the field, practice setting whatever. Quarterbacks (indiscernible) different?

RAHEEM MORRIS: They do. It's a remarkable arm talent when you watch him throw the football or when you hear it, and when you stand out there playing linebacker, it's intimidating.

The only thing I can really compare it to is letting Julio Jones run what you call a lightning right now, when he runs through you full speed and you know he's going to stop and you're still not really sure. And then he stops all of the sudden at the drop of a dime, you're standing there saying I'm glad he stopped or he ran through me.

Felt that way when he was throwing the ball, when he was throwing it and laying over here. I'm watching.

And that was impressive to watch. It was an impressive day, it was an impressive outing by him, to hear the ball come off his hands, see the ball go over your head, just to watch him throw the football, it was a good day for all of us

to go out there watch that workout. I thought it was a pretty impressive feat.

Q. The spin as much as velocity:

RAHEEM MORRIS: You know, I can't really tell you what that sound was because you are not going to be around it.

Q. Off the charts?

TERRY FONTENOT: It's true. That's why you want to see things in person, because you see film, the RPMs, when you're in person, the way it pops off -- because you see it on tape, you see those things, but I know exactly what you're talking about. There's things that -- I have a good friend, baseball scout, talks about the difference in seeing something in person and hearing it. It's a completely different feel.

It's like that with (inaudible). It's that with all athletes. That's why you want to see guys in person, when you really feel take off, feel the power, those things. So throwing the ball, the way that pops off his hand and velocity and all those things, Charles, you're right, seeing it in person does make a difference. It does.

Q. How would you describe -- I would think, is it fair to say that you wanted an impact starter in the second round and to them, how would you assess your second rounders so far -- Richie, Troy and Matthew Bergeron?

TERRY FONTENOT: Richie and Troy, Matthew Bergeron and Arnold Ebiketie. If you go back, you say obviously Bergeron started every game last year, and I truly believe that if he continues to move forward, you're going to have the best guard combination in the league with him and Chris. We have a lot of confidence in those guys, and his tools and his ability and things he did last year.

We know he's going to take a step and continue to improve fundamentals. And this is a big athletic man. We're very excited about him. You go back a year with AK and AK really came on as a rusher and obviously he has places to grow but we believe that he's going to take another step this year and continue to grow.

You take a step back and the next one is Troy. Unfortunate injury early on. The thing that you like about, when you take a guy, whether talking about Richie or Troy, when you take certain positions, you say they're going to develop at linebacker or safety but you know they can make an impact in the kicking game while they're developing. You would say with both those players, right away there's impacts in the kicking game with Troy and

Richie. And then with Troy, he's really coming on shown a lot of flashes at linebacker, big athletic man, that obviously raw talent that has areas to grow in but unfortunate injury.

And we're really excited, but we know he's going to be -- the way he runs, the power, he's going to be an impactful player for us.

And then Richie, with Richie, he was more special teams early on. Then you got -- we started doing more things. Where Richie excelled more was playing near the line of scrimmage, doing some of those different things. Pressuring. He's got to improve things in coverage and some areas of his game but we truly believe he's going to do that with Raheem and with our secondary coaches.

RAHEEM MORRIS: I was just laughing, I'm laughing, you're talking about second-round picks. As a coach, you just want them to be starters. I believe everybody you've mentioned has had a moment of starting, time of starting or season of starting.

Just coming from the outside in, looking at the great job he's done, not just in the second round but just in all the things you guys put together, the pieces you've been able to bring to Atlanta, especially taking the three-year hiatus and getting (indiscernible), coming back and having a whole new outfit, really being -- Bergeron is a really good football player and watching him play last year as a rookie. That's a tough thing to do.

It's tough to go from college to playing in the interior line inside of the ball and be ready and to be mature and developed enough to do those things.

That's a high-quality pick. You talk about AK playing the edge, still talking about playing up front, he's got a significant amount of starts under his belt, playing heavy, playing with nice hands, doing stuff like that. That's really exciting.

Usually the easier transitions go from wideout and secondary, things of that nature, and Richie really stepped up. My evaluation -- I told Richie when I got here -- it was wrong on him. I didn't think he was as good a player as he is.

He's played really well, does some good things for you guys, tackles strong. Does some good things. I was in another place, obviously, when I evaluated him. But he's shown me a lot of really good things on tape. And who was the other pick we were talking about?

Q. Troy?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Troy, obviously, like he mentioned, had the injury side, didn't have as much tape. But you could feel the speed, kind of like we were just talking about, throwing the ball in person. And birthday boy this week, last week, and really fired up to get him going, see what we can do moving forward. But I've been impressed with those picks on the outside looking in.

TERRY FONTENOT: And the common thread in all those guys is we believe that character (indiscernible) the ceiling and the floor. No different than the second round pick today. You're talking about a high character guy. When you see the skill set that he has, big, powerful, length, athleticism, that whole skill set, and then he's a high character guy. So you believe that whether -- because it's an imperfect game. There's going to be some ups and downs.

But when you have a guy that has high character and has talent and we believe in the right environment they're going to grow and get most of their ability. I would say the common thread in those guys, at different levels of their career, they're high character guys. We'll get them to the most of their ability.

Q. (Inaudible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yes, sir.

Q. I'm wondering, as you go through this draft and you go through trade talks, do you feel like you know enough about what's going to come in the future, the impact is -- does it allow impact, the decisions in the third round draft pick?

TERRY FONTENOT: Again, not something really we can talk about. But our focus is to draft and not think about anything else. And we know we get out of the draft, and whatever that point is with the league, and they'll obviously let us know what we need to do, to cooperate, and we go through that process. But our focus is just on the draft.

Q. (Inaudible) you have four fives and three sixes. (Inaudible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: Yes, sir. Do you want us to come and talk right when the draft ends, before the draft and parade or you want us to end the draft, parade and come --

RAHEEM MORRIS: They don't make those decisions.

TERRY FONTENOT: Come talk during the sixth round. We don't have any sevens. So when we finish up and get the sixes done we'll come in after that.

