

Atlanta Falcons Media Conference

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Atlanta, Georgia, USA

Coach Raheem Morris

GM Terry Fontenot

Draft Press Conference



TERRY FONTENOT: Excited about the five players we were able to add today starting with Brandon Dorlus. We talk about adding up front and we talk about pass rush. And he really brings those factors. He's a defensive end, yet he's versatile, plays inside, inside rush. The trace that he has and we're very excited about him, productive player.

JD Bertrand, Blessed Trinity's finest, very excited about him, Alpharetta. You talk about a smart, instinctive football player, the character, the makeup. He's a four-down player because what he can do as a run defender in coverage and also in the kicking game, which is critical.

When we're drafting everybody we have a vision, have to have a vision for them and how they're going to contribute in that area. And we're excited about him contributing all those areas.

Jase McClellan, Alabama, a runner, natural runner, physical, strong back that three-down in terms of what he can do in the pass game. He can pass protect, catch the ball. Very excited about him, another top makeup guy.

Casey Washington, 39 and a half inch vertical, (indiscernible) confirmed. Prototype, size, speed. He has measurables he has traits. We spent time with him. We love the makeup. Plays with a chip on his shoulder. He's a competitor. We know he'll be able to contribute in other areas as well.

Zion Logue, Georgia, big, massive man. He's huge, big, strong, physical -- good developmental traits. And I love the size and love the makeup.

Very excited about these players and again once the draft ends we'll add some more. But we feel like it was a good day, good draft. We're very excited.

Q. (Indiscernible) looks like he moved around kind of

like (indiscernible) for Oregon. You all see his versatility (indiscernible)?

RAHEEM MORRIS: The cool part about Dorlus was his pass rush, his inside pass rush, his ability to move around and pass rush and be disruptive. That's what most attracted us to him.

It was less about Ruke, when Ruke had the ability to play nose, a little 4-1. He has the ability to play 3 tech.

Dorlus can do some of those things but his primary trait would be playing on the edge of a human and absolutely winning on the pass rush, attacking edges, attacking some of those things, creating that disruption up front that we can use sort of like a Grady, sort of like a DO. Being able to get the rotation inside with those guys rushing the passer, I feel like can really help us.

That's an area of need that we talked about. I know sometimes we get caught up with just the edge, but that interior rush that we developed around here with the two older guys that we have and our two veterans, to be able to add somebody inside there that can do some of the things, we thought would be pretty critical for us. And once again Terry found a great one out in Oregon.

And lucky enough he was coached by some people that we know very well in Tosh Lupoi out there in Oregon that was with us in Atlanta the first time around who I have a lot of respect for and some of the things he said.

Q. Terry, no corners in the draft. That was kind of widely thought of as a need for this team. Can you talk about what went into that and whether that's going to be something you continue to look at going forward?

TERRY FONTENOT: First of all, we'll definitely continue to look at it. It's 24/7, 365. Once the draft ends we're still going, whether we're talking about a possible trade, whether we're talking about signing another player and that goes right up into the season. We're always going to look at opportunities.

That is a position, we would have liked to add that position.



And yet you don't want to force our reach or do something that you shouldn't. So we had guys that obviously we're trying to get back in the first. It could have been a corner. And then you continue to go through the draft and it just depends.

Like, defensive line we're excited. We wanted to get at some size, some youth and some pass rush. And we really were able to load up the D line. That was a goal going into the draft. If it didn't fall that way, if we would have gotten other positions -- corner, offensive linemen -- we would have went those ways.

You don't want to force it or reach in the draft. You want a clear vision for the players you bring in. Didn't work out in corner, but you're right. We'll look today.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Today he brought in Hamilton and King for us to add to our roster and do different things. He's also had and A.J. Terrell here. We also have Clark. We also have Hughes. We also have Alford playing inside for us. All those guys, Brooks, that can contribute to us. And we feel really good about a lot of those things. We didn't add anybody within this draft structure.

Q. The volume of front seven defenders you added, is that an indication that you want to just have a bunch of bodies that you can roll there? Is that an indication these guys can play -- you look at a lot of defensive linemen and some of them play sort of an edge (indiscernible) adjacent?

RAHEEM MORRIS: You're right on what you're saying, you're spot on what you're saying. I love to be able to move people around. I love to be able to put people in different spots and find different units that can go in and cause disruption for different reasons, whether that be rushing with power, whether it be rushing like we talked about with Dorlus on the edge, whether it be doing a bunch of different things.

And that rotation up front in the National Football League, as we know, it continues. That rotation up front is probably the most rotated position in football. When you're talking about the D line, you're talking about everybody getting in a 60-snap game 20, 30 snaps a game, and you can get the most out of those guys.

So adding that flexibility today and Terry being able to add the three interior players and with a little bit of flex outside in certain type of situations -- whether you're talking about a five technique, a five down spacing or a four down spacing, whatever we choose to be in -- and some of the new spacing that you might not have seen around here with our 6-2 and we start doing some of those things. It

fires me up, really fires me up with the ability to be able to play with those things as a coach and as we grow and develop from this offseason as we go into training camp and all those things in the preseason. It gives you a lot of toys and tools to be able to go out there be creative as a defensive coordinator.

Q. How much did you use that 6-2 the last couple years?

RAHEEM MORRIS: I would say we really use it a lot situationally. I was with Eric Henderson, now at USC, who really taught me that and did a good job of piquing my interest and wanting to do some of those things. It was really helpful to us.

I had a lot of fun looking at it and being able to use it in short yardage situations, goal line type still. And to be able to throw it out there every once in a while on somebody and figure out what you can do and how you can target it in the run game. It just creates a little bit of unknown for some of those other different guys when you're playing the game that way.

Q. With these day three guys, a lot of them are expected to contribute on special teams. There's going to be essentially a new special teams play with the new kickoff. Does that factor into the way you evaluate some of these guys and decide who you want to --

TERRY FONTENOT: Absolutely. And Marquis Williams and Steven King do a really good job and spend a lot of time -- obviously our scouts do. And our scouts will -- because sometimes with special teams tape you have to go back and watch some older tape, and sometimes they might not have played many special teams.

But then you have to really look at the skill set and look at the makeup. A lot of our guys from scouts (indiscernible) getting into Marquice and they're all looking at tape of the player and, okay, is this player tough? How do they play in space?

And you really have to project the special teams stuff. But a combination of what we see on film and the combination of the makeup. But, yes, there has to be a vision for them doing that.

We're not going to draft a receiver and in the sixth round and not believe that he's got to be able to go down on kickoff and go down as a gunner. They'll have to do those things to be able to make the team. Again a running back, some of that is looking at the makeup and looking at the tape we do have.

Q. With regard to JD, you mentioned him specifically with the kicking game, do you see him as being one of those kickoff coverage guys? It feels weird to say that because it's only covering (indiscernible) 20 yards up the field. But is that specifically kind of one of the areas that you thought you could fit in?

TERRY FONTENOT: Not to get into the coverage and tell you about our secrets on the kickoff coverage we may use him there may not, we'll see.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Talking about JD, the makeup, that's what Terry was referring to. That guy is the definition of the makeup. Captain America himself is going to be able to come here and contribute in all types of ways, just who he's been and what he's been throughout his career.

Just to get into the player a little bit because I have to brag on him. His process for us was such a good process. When you talk to him and talked about his daily and rhythm and his routine that he formulated for himself in college in the offseason.

And I guarantee you he's going to be one of those guys we'll have to come in here and try to pull him back a little bit just to get him started, get him going again so he doesn't hurt himself.

I'm sure you'll see him on any phase that we ask him to play, whether that be kicking or defense. And this guy might volunteer for offense, who knows. He might give Led a couple of fullback snaps, one of those type of guys, players. He's local. He's from Atlanta. He's done all things Atlanta. People here are going crazy about it. Trained by Victor Green, safety played for the Jets. I have respect for. Watched him coach and scout. And we have a lot of information on that player, and that was a great opportunity for me to brag on him when we talk about some of the prowess, things that he brings to special teams and our team in general.

TERRY FONTENOT: I know James wouldn't mind. I got a text right after the pick from James Leenitis, raving about him, one of his mentors. I could go through some of the other mentors, some of the better guys in the league to do it. He spends time with those guys going through the process and going through those.

So this guy, he eats, breathes, sleeps football. It's all about football with him. That was so exciting when we spent time with him, sitting down, going through it, and talking through the process, like Raheem said. We're very excited about him.

Q. You mentioned loading up on defensive linemen, what were some of the objectives you had -- what were some of the other goals you had?

TERRY FONTENOT: Going into the draft? You want to make your team better, right? And like we always say, whether we're building a strength or adding to some particular positions of need, the main thing you don't want to do is we don't want to reach in terms of we're going off our board and our people and our process, and you want to make sure that you let it come to you the right way.

But that was one of the objectives we wanted to. Look, we wouldn't say there was anything that we said, okay, if we get out of this draft and we don't get this -- we wanted to make sure we weren't desperate in any spot. We made sure we added in the right spots.

But D line is one of those areas we wanted to bring in some youth and size and pass rush. Never can have too many pass rushers. To Raheem's point earlier, that's one of the positions, where when you're talking about most depth players, if you're talking about a depth offensive linemen, they'll go the whole game and not play with the exception to PAT, right, or field goal.

But when you're talking about depth defensive linemen, they're playing the same amount of snaps sometimes the starters are playing. They have to play a high percentage of snaps. So the defensive linemen you have up on game day, they're playing quality snaps. That's a critical spot in terms of that. And we want to keep adding there.

Q. Seemed like the front seven guys you drafted that there's a premium put on length and versatility. Is that fair to say, discuss that a little bit?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Talked to me in the hallway. He knew I liked length. We definitely -- I don't know if it was put on by Terry or just overall evaluations when we got together, just talking about profiles and what people look like and your prototypical type of player at each position, and we certainly put a high level of value on length and getting bigger and stronger and getting faster, other than JD, he's the only guy that had short arm tonight. Bypassed that because I liked him so much. And I told him that when he was here, so I'm not talking bad about him.

But we certainly did that, as a coaching staff, for sure. And the collaboration between the scouts and Terry and myself and Kyle Smith, certainly being a forefront of what we talked about from the college standpoint, looked at it that way as well, and we're able to communicate and talk about all those things, how we wanted to work those positions, and I feel like we certainly added that to our resumé up

front. And even on really all areas of the football field, to be honest.

Q. What's important to you?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Did a study couple years ago -- I don't know if I want to tell you this at a live press conference, but I will. We did a study. I can tell you. It was with Jeff Ulbrich, to be honest. Talked about the variables of length. For linebackers, it was getting on and off of blocks, and correlated so well to what we do.

Talked about from the secondary and anywhere on defense, the people that had more length, they missed less tackles. And you start to look at it. You just put these charts together of length, size, time, didn't matter, the height and all those things. And length became this major factor that we really fell in love with and wanted to be able to increase some of those things in those studies.

When you get bored as coaches in the offseason, preferably your second or third year -- not the first one when you guys are torturing me with this stuff -- but you get a chance to do some of those studies and things you love to do and look at and create some different variables for yourself to get that edge.

No secret right now, people are looking for it. I don't feel too bad about telling you that. But it's certainly something we put high value on that we certainly want to look into.

Q. Today, Bill Polian was on the radio talking about your pick, the outrage. He didn't understand it. He said in the scouting community it was a great pick, great pick and said they had the quarterback from 8 to 12. How has it been being -- you gave us stuff to talk about for three days.

TERRY FONTENOT: So much respect for Bill. He's special. But you said he said it was --

Q. He said it wasn't a surprise in the scouting community.

TERRY FONTENOT: Gotcha. Makes sense.

Q. Because the scouting was such that (indiscernible)?

TERRY FONTENOT: If you would have told me in January that, when we're sitting there and the quarterback, wondering who is going to be our quarterback next year, right, we're getting ready, now Raheem's in the building, we're sitting down, okay, what's the first thing we've got to do. The elephant in the room, as Raheem called, it we

have to figure out the quarterback situation. If you would have told me at that time that we would have Kirk Cousins for right now and Michael Penix for the future, I would have told you it was a pipe dream. I would have told you, if you would have told me, I would say sign me up for that.

Like, this is exciting. We were very excited. It's the most important position in pro sports. Most important position in pro sports, and to feel this good about it right now, we couldn't be more excited. Again, to have guys with the right makeup, like a guy like Kirk Cousins, everything he means for us on and off the field, we're so excited about him. We could not be more excited about Kirk Cousins.

And then again in terms of the future, with Michael Penix, not just about the player on the field, and you all see the player on the field and you know that. You spent time with him, you know the person as well. Guys with that kind of makeup and the track record, this is really exciting.

So we understand that when people don't understand something or they expect something else or so, but we are extremely excited right now.

RAHEEM MORRIS: To piggyback off what Terry said. For me personally -- I've always been like this -- Bill Polian, as much respect we have for everybody and everybody's opinion, because you're certainly entitled to it, I won't ride the emotional roller coaster and I won't let our organization ride the emotional roller coaster. When you make those decisions, you can't be off of what everybody else thinks and what they say. Those reactions are going to happen. Some of the most bold decisions and anything we've ever done not just football, they always happen when it comes with a little bit of risk. We're not going to run away from those things and those reps if we believe in it. And we certainly believe in it. We won't waver on it.

I won't ride the emotional roller coaster saying Bill's got it right or Lombardi has it wrong. It is what it is. Those people, I have so much respect for what they've done in this game, how they've gone about their business and how they've done it, they're entitled to their opinions. It will be no different for anybody else, if you're walking around on the street, if you want to sit down and talk about it, feel free. Like we've done over the past couple of days with us, we're not going to duck and run away from those situations, how we go about our business. As long as Terry and myself and our ownership and the Falcons and the fan base and everybody can understand, we're right here ready to explain it at any time.

TERRY FONTENOT: Appreciate that about Raheem. If our goal was to get instant gratification, then we'd be doing different things. That's not our goal. Our goal is to build a

sustained winner to win right now, and to win in the future.

And so that's our goal. So when we're making decisions, there's never one time we're making decisions do we ever say are we going to get instant -- we don't say that. We never ask that question.

And we obviously love our fans. We appreciate our fans. That's why we work as hard as we possibly can to make sure we're going to win games now and in the future.

Like, that's all we -- from myself, Raheem, a lot of guys upstairs right now, if you all would see the work that these coaches like a lot of them haven't even -- their families aren't -- Zac Robinson, they had a baby and we got the contract done with him. He was in the hospital, and he got the contract done. He's texting me at two in the morning about players and about what we need to -- then he flew straight here, and poor me, he left and he's been here since then, and all these coaches, their families are somewhere else.

I've said it before, our staff and our scouts, they haven't taken a deep breath since the season ended. We will do everything we can to make sure that we win this year and moving forward. That's all we're thinking about. So we know sometimes there will be outside noise and those things, and within these walls we're doing everything we can to -- we were just on the phone with a player, I won't talk about the conversation, but we're so excited right now we're going to do everything we can to build this the right way to win now and win in the future.

RAHEEM MORRIS: With that being said, with the full support to Kirk, because this doesn't come without certain expectations from everyone else. And that's what I mean by not riding the emotional roller coaster. We came up with a decision, this is what we plan to do. And Kirk does not have to look over his shoulder every time he throws a bad pass. That is not the case.

So I know I will have to tell you guys once or twice that is not the case. We are here to go win, and we're here to go win it all. We're here to win as much as we can win. And we set these goals as a team and we want to follow through on those goals. We had an opportunity to build and do something different with some sustained winning over time, and we took an op, and then right back to business to doing what we need to do to try to win right now as many games as we could win today. You can't win any today.

TERRY FONTENOT: I'll say one more thing on this. Speaking of Bill Polian, I love him so much. I talked to Bill actually before I took this job, and he said now, listen,

outside of -- he would be fine with me sharing this -- but he said the President of the United States and sports GMs, they get the most criticism of anybody in the world. So he said get ready.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Quarterbacks are next.

TERRY FONTENOT: Quarterbacks, there you go. At that time he just said those two, he said get ready and get your family ready. He said, I've won a lot of games in my career, I've been criticized a lot. Whether in good times, bad times, whatever it is, get ready for the criticism. He's right. It's true.

You do have those conversations with your family and make sure everybody's prepared for it because it is what it is. And you have to have broad shoulders to sit in these seats. You're right, quarterback, any leadership position. You have to have broad shoulders and be able to put things in perspective and handle them the right way.

Q. Kirk was drafted in 2012, Washington, drafted in the same draft as RGIII. Does that give him the unique perspective on the situational change?

RAHEEM MORRIS: I don't really know. I'll have to ask Kirk that. I didn't want to talk to him on the phone about any of those situations things of that nature because it wasn't about that. It was more about being empathetic about being how he felt at that time being able to talk to him in a quick moment. Keep doing that the only way you can constantly communicate, I tell the guys it's open, honest, continuous, continue throughout the process.

Because I tell you this guys, I'm going to have to tell you multiple times, about how we're going to go about our business. I get it. It's like anything else. But I don't know how he felt about it, and I don't know how he feels about it now or does he have a different perspective because he was drafted with another quarterback. Those would be great questions for him to reflect on it and think about those things.

Q. Along the vein of the questions posed about Bill Polian and everything, there's no great way to ask this question. How do you get yourself into the mindset that like this is something that is possible that you can do? Because you talked about resetting the model, spending your draft capital for a developmental quarterback. But I don't think anybody's done it to this extent of going up to this top 10 pick. I think a lot of people would just say you can't do that, like nobody's done it, and so you --

TERRY FONTENOT: There are. Are you saying

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

someone's taken a player higher?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Top 10.

TERRY FONTENOT: Top 10. So Kansas City was 10 with Alex Smith. Where was Philip Rivers, with Drew? I have a list. I'll actually get you the list, but there are some. But when you say how do you get yourself to that point, well, it's like we talk about as we evaluate the draft and evaluate when you go through that process and you talk about it. The draft is for the next four to five years and could be plus or more. So you go through, evaluate it, and you study previous drafts and you study -- and particularly at the quarterback position, there's not going to be that opportunity every year if you just look at -- all you guys do that, right? You spend probably more time than anybody outside of us doing that, studying history, and so you're not going to always have those opportunities. That's just the truth.

So knowing that, we're at eight, and there truly is an opportunity, if it falls a certain way, for us to do something and have our quarterback of the future, now you have to -- we're not going to reach. But if we have that kind of conviction and that kind of belief, we believe in the people in our building, we believe in our process, and so that's why we did it.

And again, we wouldn't have -- if we didn't have that kind of belief in the player that was there, we weren't going to say we're definitely taking a quarterback, that wasn't the goal to say we have to come out of this draft with a quarterback, but it's because of the player that was there and the belief that we have.

And again when you study -- and I know you guys do -- when you study, then you get at that because you don't know when it's going to happen. You can't guarantee moving forward that you're going to have that opportunity again. So that's what gives you the confidence to do it is because of the conviction and the belief in this building.

RAHEEM MORRIS: We did draft a Georgia Bulldog last, guys. So somebody wants to acknowledge that. Let's go.

TERRY FONTENOT: Big dude. You got his confirmed measurables, just a tick below 6'6".

Q. To follow up on this, I guess you recognize that sounds like it doesn't matter that it doesn't have to be communicated well, it will be a different dynamic than it would have been otherwise, if you picked someone besides Michael (indiscernible) -- we'll have to do things this way, and I know I need to get in contact with Kirk or whatever to reassure them about the

things they're talking about?

RAHEEM MORRIS: I think it's going to be constant communication. Just in general. Because the only thing that you can show is you keep showing people that you mean it and what you're saying and everything's going to happen, because it's always going to be some form of looking over your shoulder.

And I'm going to try to eliminate that as much as I can. So I have no issues with telling you guys, this is a process. This is truly our future. And I don't want to throw random numbers out there, but we do know Kirk has guaranteed money for three years. That's what we do know. We know that, and we know we're going to give him an opportunity to go out there and win for us at the highest level. And as we all know, our whole game is based on winning and losing, for coaches, for players, for personnel department, for writers. If we lose, then they'll probably change you guys out as well. It is just what it is.

We'll all ultimately be all judged on that. But I think if I can just be up front and honest about all those things, like I'm trying to be, things are going to be good.

You'll be attacked for the timing when should you have done this or tell that person. Our information is so sensitive, it's so delicate, this thing runs crazy if Led finds out we're taking a quarterback three days before and how much that could happen. And when you tell him, is that a right time? There's never a right time. That's the honest truth.

When you do tell them, there's always going to be some fallback, but it is what it is and how you go about in your business and your communication moving forward and how you want to do that with your team and with everybody else.

Q. Was there a moment that you guys knew that it had to be Penix -- where you knew it had to be Penix with that pick?

TERRY FONTENOT: It was definitely going to be Penix? Was there a moment? You don't ever know anything until you're on that clock. I mean, look, we have all those discussions because obviously we spent a lot of time with Arthur Blank and so we have all those discussions about possibilities and different scenarios and, hey, this could happen and we'd be excited about this and this is why. So we have all those discussions. I'd say you don't know what's happening until you're on that clock.

RAHEEM MORRIS: You're going with those pods of people. You can't really pick before you go and it happens



because now, like everybody is holding their stuff back. Everybody would like to be able to hold all those things back. We have so much information now that is such a line on what you need and some of those things that you're going to be right a lot of times. Here's one of the times we were able to stump the world and we've been talking about it for three days. It's been nice.

Q. Has it been difficult talking about it three days now. It's a day one decision leading into day three. You picked a Georgia Bulldog last.

RAHEEM MORRIS: I hate for it to be the story of the draft, but I know it will be. That's just how our world is based and is driven. But I can't say it's annoying, no, because it's what people want to see it's piqued more interest.

What's Kelce's girlfriend name? I feel like Taylor Swift and Terry is Kelce. We're making this thing popular.

TERRY FONTENOT: What are we doing? We're getting tired. We should wrap this up.

RAHEEM MORRIS: We're famous right now, I don't know.

Q. When you pulled the trigger on it, did you know it was going to be the story of the draft, this kind of conjecture and discussion?

TERRY FONTENOT: We know there's -- like you say, you prepare for those things and you definitely understand that, and so you've got to be prepared for it. But again there's never a time when we're talking about making decisions, okay, we need to make a decision based off how it's going to be received or how it's going to be. No, we make sure we're doing the right things for the organization and those are the factors we look at.

Q. What do you think about the role for Jase McLellan, talked about it earlier, what player do you envision him being just looking forward and what kind of role do you envision him being?

TERRY FONTENOT: Like I say, we love the runner. Like a guy smart, tough, versatile, but the fact that -- natural runner, the way he runs the ball, the way he hits it but also the fact that he can protect. He's smart. He can catch the ball. He has versatility. Talk about the toughness.

Look, you look through drafts and you take -- there's some positions that it is hard to -- we look at hit rates on everything. What's the hit rate at this point, what's the hit rate at this. You were talking about taking quarterbacks in the third and fourth and it's not a good hit rate. There's different hit rates for every position. The hit rate at running

backs late is really good. So we're excited about him. Excited about the makeup. We like taking players from Bama, we took one last year and that worked pretty good. Georgia too. We like taking players from Georgia too.

Q. I think you guys took, I think it was, three team captains this year and this class last year (indiscernible) what's the attribute that's enticing you guys?

RAHEEM MORRIS: Ethos.

TERRY FONTENOT: It's about ethos. We want players with high makeups because that sets the floor and the ceiling when you have high makeups, like what we're talking about yesterday, talking about the second-round picks, we want players with high makeups. Not everybody is a captain.

Everybody might not be a leader but they're good teammates. But there's not one player that we took in this draft that we would say isn't either a captain, a leader or a great teammate. These guys check all the boxes. We're extremely excited about it.

RAHEEM MORRIS: Been such a great job incorporating character into our draft process and that's how you get captains. That's how you get the guys he's talking about, those leaders.

We always end it with our ethos guys and who fits it best and about football character, some of those things. Terry and those guys have done a good job, filling in the coaches, really because you don't know. You get a blank slate of tape and go make the decisions and you get the good stuff you need whether they're going to fit within our building or our structure.

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