

Houston Texans Media Conference

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Lovie Smith

Press Conference



Q. How do you try to defend a guy like Christian?

LOVIE SMITH: A lot of people tried to do that. As you said, he's one of the best players in our league, can do it all. Of course he's tough duty. As a receiver when he's catching the football, whether out of the back field, splitting him out as a wide receiver, they do a great job of putting him in different spots getting the ball to him. But he's a running back and of course he can make you miss in the open field, run in between the tackles. I'm telling you all the things he does well, but how do you stop a guy? Well, it's still going to go back to first off being sound and disciplined. You can't make a mistake, you have to have somebody in every gap, gang tackle, pursue to the football, all of those things gives you the best chance to slow him down a little bit. Not many people are going to stop him completely.

Q. From the Panthers do you see that they mix and match more than most teams to normally do?

LOVIE SMITH: Mix and match? What do you mean by that?

Q. Playing McCaffrey at wide receiver, different things, sometimes even receivers run the ball.

LOVIE SMITH: I don't think many people have a guy like that and when you do have a guy like that, you always trying to get a favorable matchup and the more positions you put him in, the better chance you have of getting that. So it's kind of unique in that sense and as I said the coaches do a great job of that.

Q. What did you see from your defense last week that you really liked?

LOVIE SMITH: That's a glass half full for sure. Which I like. Things we -- Justin Reed's play. We didn't play the run and we gave up some big plays, we didn't like that. But our guys played hard, they show up always and we always want to start fast on the road. We were able to do that, get a stop right away. Jacob Martin rushing the passer,

different things like that. What we like is the few times we took the ball away, but there's just so much we can improve upon. And that's why, when you don't play your best game, you want to get back on the field as soon as you can and a Thursday night game of course allows you to do that.

Again, we talked about the personnel as a defensive player to play against one of the best players in the league, start with that. And they have so much more. Excellent wide receiver corp, as fast a receiver corp as we're going to probably play. And Sam Darnold is playing outstanding ball. He's been a good player for a long period of time and seems like he's gotten in the perfect situation for him.

Q. What do you think makes that situation so much better for him now? What do you think they're doing that's kind of accentuating his abilities?

LOVIE SMITH: I think most quarterbacks will say starting off with to have a special running back with you, that helps an awful lot. You got to still stop the run first and that leads you to being able to pass the football, as a passer. But he can make all the throws, strong arm, smart quarterback, mobile enough, and I think it's a perfect offense for what he does best.

Q. Keeping in mind the glass half full, are you even remotely surprised that you've been preaching takeaways for a long time since you got here and the way your team has had some success at that?

LOVIE SMITH: Well I can't say that I'm surprised, I've been disappointed that we haven't been able to grasp our philosophy on how we want to play defense. We have players that take coaching, so I wouldn't say surprised, it's something that we have to continue to do. I think you put an emphasis -- anything that's important to you I think as a coach, and you put a big emphasis on it, and you have guys that are willing to -- I mean you can get it done, but not the way we want. I mean, that was good getting a couple last week and every time you see the defense taking the ball away it kind of helps, but there's so much more that we can do.

Q. After the game, Christian Kirksey talked about there being too many missed tackles. When you look at that on film how do you as a coach go about addressing that with the team as far as just tackling and making plays?

LOVIE SMITH: We address tackling every day we go on the football field. Just some days you miss tackles, it's no more than that. It's not like we haven't been preaching it, haven't been working on tackling. Some days you miss tackles, I think it's as simple as that. You want to get back out on the football field as much as anything. It's critical though and there were too many and it's one thing to miss a tackle and just a great play by an offensive player, it's another just not to wrap up and some of those things that we did. That's not us, we haven't seen that since we have been here and hopefully won't see it again.

Q. (Question about defending against the run.)

LOVIE SMITH: Well, no, we just, I just assumed that everybody believes in running the football and each week you have to really be ready for all the different type of runs. When you have a commitment to the run, which they have, you're going to get a whole lot of fronts of all different types. And then with a special back like that, again, when you don't, when you haven't played your best ball the week before, especially playing the run, you want to get that guy out there. We're better than that and what better chance to show it of course and against a team like this.

Q. The stats on Jacob Martin, he's one of the fastest in terms of getting off the start. What do you see when you watch him every day and just how he plays like that?

LOVIE SMITH: I haven't seen that stat, but it doesn't surprise me. Jacob has excellent speed. He fits a profile that we would like at our five technique, our open end position. He's athletic enough, you've seen him play on different special teams too. Maybe even linebacker-type skill set that he has. It's a big game for him of course playing against his old college coach too. But we want to be able to rush the passer with a four-man rush and not have to rely on blitzing and Jacob does that. You look back to the pre-season, I can recall against Dallas to start the game off he had a -- get him in a one-on-one situation with a tackle, again, he can beat a lot of guys.

Q. What's the key to rushing with four when you have so many guys blocking?

LOVIE SMITH: That's a tough one. I still don't quite know if I understand the question you're saying.

Q. When you're rushing four and they're keeping five.

LOVIE SMITH: And they're keeping five. Now I'm with you. You say what's the key? Well, in an ideal world, even when we blitz -- to me a good blitz is when you get in a one-on-one situation. When they're keeping other guys in, they can't keep enough guys in where everybody is double teamed and that guy has a win. Sometimes it's just as simple as that. And if you're keeping that many guys in, that kind of lends to us playing a little bit of zone coverage. If they're outnumbering you as far as protection, we should be able to outnumber them as far as the coverage part. That's a basic philosophy that we have, we're going to get that time-in, week-in, and it's a compliment to the defensive line if teams feel like they have to do it that way.

Q. (Question about tackling.)

LOVIE SMITH: I think what you can practice, what you can't practice is taking guys to the ground. But I think most -- you say it's bad tackling, it's more of the approach, as much as anything, it's about leverage with most things. And that was the case the other day. And then just wrapping up. You don't have to put a guy down all the way on the ground, it's been so long since anyone has been tackling all the way to the ground and we play good games without missing tackles where we have been using the same approach, just got to concentrate on it a little bit more, get more guys to the ball and wrap up better.

Q. When you look about your preparation and you mentioned everything about Christian McCaffrey, how much do you have to tell your guys, obviously that's a focal point, but you mentioned all the speed that they have on outside, that they don't turn their back and that some guys are going to just have to make a play in certain instances?

LOVIE SMITH: I think it always comes down to that a little bit, but I think we're all kind of, you know, students of the game a little bit. You know the special players in the league, they know who McCaffrey is. But it is so much more than that. In order for that to happen you have to have a good offensive line. I thought the offensive lined played well. You have to have a quarterback that can push the ball down the field. So I think whatever affects you the most you concentrate on that a little bit more. Our secondary, our back end, believe me, they know all about the skill guys that they have at the receiver position and tight end. And the linebackers of course know both.

Q. You mentioned Justin earlier. How much difference did you see watching him on film coming into this year and seeing him play on the field?

LOVIE SMITH: Well coming in, what I notice about Justin is that he played hard every down. I think one of the first calls I made to him, I was watching video of him just running a guy down, playing hard. That's a good starting spot. What Justin has not been able to do an awful lot in the past that I saw were splash plays, big plays. And if you're a DB, if you're talking about one of the better DB's in the league, it's about them going, being able to go and get the ball. And that interception he had the other day, we were in a typical zone, one of our signature cover two defense, safety is reading the quarterback, excellent break, he's capable of those type plays. If you just look at skill set, he's got great speed, he'll hit you, he's a smart player, he's got a lot going for him. But maybe my favorite play that he made Sunday against the Browns was our safeties also have to be able to tackle and to be able to, to take the ball away there are based on a big hit. He can do a lot of things well.

Q. (Question about Terrence Mitchell in concussion protocol.)

LOVIE SMITH: That's it. And that's pretty much what we go on. If a guy's in a concussion protocol, if he can go he's in, if not it's always about the next man up I'm sure that's what coach Culley would tell you, that's what I'm saying. You mentioned Tremon Smith that stepped up Saturday, I've seen him get better and better throughout. So it will be that mentality as we go through and again we'll just keep bumping guys up and we expect them to play well.

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