

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. What enabled the run game to finally get going?

ARTHUR SMITH: Oh, you know, in any game, we talked about it last week, just continue to work. And then didn't have the start we wanted. Some of it credit to them and some our own doing.

We got to be better early. There is always stuff you got to work on regardless of the outcome of the game. Clearly that was not good enough for us. We were able to adapt and settle into the game. That's the big thing. It's just a long game. They're going to have a new plan, you know, how it's going, adapt to the situation. Our guys did a good job. We preach about don't panic.

You know, we saw what they were doing. They were going to have a plan of the day. You get that, settle some people down, and we believe in what we're about and the way we work. We were able to take over in the second half.

Q. It's one thing to have a commitment to the run game and stick to it.

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure.

Q. I mean, you have to have the conditioning, too.

ARTHUR SMITH: Absolutely.

Q. Where you don't tire and the other team...

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, and that's what -- again, everybody has different philosophies. We try to hang our hat on that. The way our guys worked in Latrobe, we talked about the dam or whatever breaking, but it's truth. It's not false bravado or wishing and hoping. We put a lot of work in and our guys believe in what we're doing.

The results paid off. I know going in, I know Coach (indiscernible) talked about. That was a heavyweight fight. That's a good football team. It was nice to see how the second half went.

Q. How important is it when you guys have now faced several teams that really want to also run the ball for you guys also dominate is and win the time of possession knowing they kind of want to do the same thing?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, you're talking about short-term strategy, long-term strategy. You do whatever it takes to win that game. When you're built like we are and you're really -- as this thing keeps going, you're talking about keeping the defense fresh too. When you have a dominant defense, you know, usually you average around 65 snaps a game.

If you're saving time of possession and assuming that you're in control and you have the lead, those add up. You talk about being fresher November, and December and certainly into January, what's what you want.

Q. Curious with Cordarrelle Patterson. History in Atlanta. Do you remember when you first noticed him and thought he could be a versatile piece that could help you? How have you tried to highlight his versatility?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, that one came to life when I got to Atlanta, you know. A strategy of whatever was made to clear the cap. I mean, you're looking for anybody to help. We signed CP late. Free agent first couple years, so we were in total roster transition. He was out there. We had couple coaches that worked with him in Chicago.

They knew his skillset. I watched him from afar. You know, I had done different things with kind of position of the player before with Jonu Smith. We had put him in the backfield as an H, a tight end body time, unique skillset player.

And so when we were able to sign him late, and then out of necessity, you know, we had some wide out issues in '21, so there was times -- I mean, I think we did a lot of unconventional warfare. In Miami and London we went to go win the game and we were technically in 23 personnel, but it was out like 11 and Kyle and CP and Hayden Hurst.

And so you got to make it work. That's your job. So kind of evolved from there in '21 knowing we had some coaches with some history there.

And credit to him, because he's embraced it and he can do multiple jobs. So if you're short wide outs or tight ends or backs, you're talking about a valuable game day roster player, that's your problem solve.

Van goes out, whatever happens, came back late, and so we were already short wide outs. On top of that, you still got to adapt and have a plan. He did a really nice job last week.

Q. Could he be a 50 or 20 guy if he had to...

ARTHUR SMITH: Just depends on the plan, who you got up, how many backs, how that's going in the run game. Yeah, I mean, certainly he's done it before. It just week to week, depending on who is up and what the plan is.

But going back to credit to him, to be able to play multiple spots, having history with him in a way that -- you know, attack things for him, he knows and he prepares.

Like I said, we'll see where it goes, but that's another valuable piece on offense.

Q. As an offensive playcaller to have guys like CP, maybe Connor Heyward, where it's one thing for the defense to hold up the card and say this is 22, but when they get out there could look very different.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, we've got -- going back to it I was talking about 21. We technically had two backs. If you classify CP as that. Couple tight ends. You can get into what looks like ten personnel, what looks like 11, 12, looks like 22.

You got to have the right guys to do it. Connor and CP certainly fit that mold.

Q. You're No. 7 overall in the NFL right now when it comes to third down connections.

ARTHUR SMITH: Uh-huh.

Q. I think third over in conversions. Second attempts.

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure.

Q. Now that you got to know Justin a little bit, do you maybe allow him to try to get more chunk plays on first and second downs so you're not as stressed?

ARTHUR SMITH: We certainly tried. Sometimes those numbers can be misleading. That's why I think context -- whether people want to hear it or not, there are so many things that happen on one play. You all know that. You cover it. You see it. You see the practices. You see the games.

Sometimes the way things have evolved, it's helped us grow as big as Fantasy Football is or you got all the analytical sites and people trying to dissect it. If you're just looking at numbers sometimes it would be misleading. Early down efficiency, whatever. There is some times in the run game you're throwing run alerts. The ball is not traveling really -- barely at the line of scrimmage or beyond it.

Well, it goes down as a pass. As long as you're not behind the quarterback it's not going to be considered a run. Sometimes you have run alerts.

Then a lot of times what you're seeing is really a trend in the defense. This question was asked I believe a week ago about passing numbers. You're seeing a lot of people that are playing different shell variations. They have their combination just like we have our checks. Quarters you're welcome quarter, quarter, half. Different variations of two depending on the formation.

So sometimes when you're calling -- you're trying to take a shot -- the first play of the game we were trying to take a shot and Justin had to scramble. You know, credit to them. We also weren't clean either. Two things can be true.

There are times we have pushed the ball down the field. It hasn't come to life, whether it was the look or where you got to be cleaner in the detail or they made a play and got off the spot. That's happened. So that's a mix and match of what you're calling, so some of the numbers don't tell the story.

We have tried to do that. Certainly we can do a better job or however you want to look at it. We have done that. The first play of the game was a shot. He just ended up scrambling and got off the spot and scrambled.

Q. When you have injuries at tailback, how does that impact what you've can do? How do you feel about the depth? You were asked about CP. Kind of beyond that.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, depending a lot of times whether you dress three or four, a big part is your special teams. You're allowed 48; assuming you dress an eighth lineman, technically 49.

So you've got to problem solve. That's where experience, and if you're not a rigid thinker you have to have those contingency plans going in. A lot goes back to my past. In Tennessee we had a game, I believe in '19, and we dressed a fourth specialist. We were short offensive guys and that's what have to do.

I mean, when you only have a couple backs and somebody comes out or whatever, you can get short on some of your critical downs and protections. So if you don't cross-train people you can certainly be in a mess there if you haven't planned for it.

When you have versatile players and guys that can play multiple spots, that's a big part of my job and our job as coaches.

Q. Some of your runs late you guys seemed to be getting momentum with your tight ends pulling down the line. What is the ability of guys like Connor, guys like Darnell Washington to be able to do that, open up for you guys as far as run concepts and giving you guys more things to do there?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, again, that's why I've kind of favored that spot. Going back to my history, you know, it doesn't -- that's nothing one that doesn't show up on the stat sheet.

More people now, which is exciting, you have access to film. People go back and watch it. It's not just getting the state media narratives coming from whatever you're trying to come up here and talk. You can actually see it.

So you're seeing what Darnell is doing. I've never had a tight end like Darnell. A guy that size and that kind of agility and feel for space. You can see why he was such a huge recruit going to the University of Georgia. He's playing really good football.

It allows you to do a lot whether in the run game or even in early downs. He's such a unique player and he's getting better every week. He's had some really dominant blocks. Obviously he had the fade against Denver.

Yeah, that's exciting. As a coach and really just as I've gotten to know Darnell, I think hopefully we can keep building. But the sky is the limit for him.

Q. In terms of numbers, you were talking about earlier Justin's numbers against the blitz are way better than they were in Chicago. Do the numbers tell the true story there? What is Justin doing so well when he's dealing with pressure?

ARTHUR SMITH: There is a lot going on, you know. Some of it is how we want to attack the defense. When you're able to keep them off track they're not keeping us off track, it opens up so many different things you can do schematically.

When you're able to -- sometimes if they're sitting there playing the run and trying to bring five and however they want cover it, you're going to really open up the second level of the defense, which makes some of those throws easier.

And then what you really are evaluating too is drop back, how are you doing, how are you seeing that as people try to pack the paint. Seen a lot of growth from him there.

I do think it helps anybody in any job are the reps. As you're winning you can see quarterbacks in this league, their confidence growing.

When you put it all on one player, especially a young player and putting the ball in his hands and saying, you got to drop back 45, 60 times, that's tough. That's tough for any quarterback.

So as the offense gets more in sync, certainly opens up more things. He's doing a really nice job.

Q. You had a pretty good balance of attack last game. Six different wide receivers had a catch. How do you feel about the wide receiver group at this point?

ARTHUR SMITH: Very good. I mean, I think that's what helped us a lot in Tennessee. Certainly our players, you're calling maybe at the point of attack, again goes back to sometimes you get the stat sheet that targets. Well, they may have been the first read on some things.

Again, if you're giving a heavy zone game that can affect you. When you're getting few opportunities, whether it's underneath or true man coverage, that's when you see some one-on-ones in critical situations. We got a lot more of that in Denver. That's what you saw, a lot more one-on-ones.

We've taken advantage of them and other things we have to be cleaner on. When people are playing in in different zones there has to be trust. They take away and cloud or try to double a guy in different coverage variations, you got to be able to progress and move on. Other guys got to be able to help you, otherwise you become -- you don't want to be '90s iso basketball where you're just clearing the paint and everyone knows it's going to one guy.

That's the balance you want. But if you can stay efficient

and stay ahead, we can continue to grow, it makes you more lethal as an offense.

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