

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



yards, points. Obviously the end result last week not what we wanted.

Same thing, multiple things are true. He did a good job, but we also hurt ourselves in three scoring position opportunities. First drive of the game we're right on the fringe of the field goal, and we get the personal foul. You could subjectively argue that's three points on the board. Then we had the fumble down in the low red. Who knows? At worst you have three there. Then we're right on that fringe where historically people usually pressure you there, and then we got sack fumbled. That's arguably nine points in a three-point game.

The game works out differently if those plays don't happen, but when you look back at it, those are things that hurt you... the turnover margin and then taking points off the board.

Q. You finished that game without five of your top ten offensive linemen from the preseason. You ever been through a situation like that with that many injuries on your offensive line? Has it gotten to a point where it's impacted as a play caller or a game planner what you are able to do maybe compared to what you would want to do?

ARTHUR SMITH: That happens a lot in games. Some of it's their commitment to try to make you one-dimensional. You have to adapt, and that's in every game schematically. Certainly you have to have contingency plans.

Random years, I don't know what it is, it seems to be the case. Some years you go through, and you have the same five the entire time, and then other years it's an unfortunate part of the game we have. We have had younger guys playing earlier, and I think they're doing a nice job.

Then certainly depth can hurt you, but in game when you lose a couple of backs or you are mixing-and-matching, it may take you out of some packages. Things that situational stuff, a guy like MyCole Pruitt, it forces you if you want to go bigger, then you have to use an extra lineman. Then you are down a lineman, and here's what we're doing situationally. You have to take this, and you have to make... Is it even worth calling it? Those are all

THE MODERATOR: Questions.

Q. It was obviously tough sledding for Najee for big parts of the game. When we asked him afterwards, he said he was facing eight-man box and there was a free hitter a lot of times. Would you analyze it the same way that he did, or what's your assessment of that?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, obviously he's out there on the field, and everybody has different perceptions. So a couple of things last week, some of the things they were doing, they brought a little more pressure than they have.

They had been bringing a lot of edge pressure, and people change it up. That's the game plan. Dallas will do the same thing. They'll have something for us just like we do every week.

I didn't think we were as clean early in the run game. There's a multiple things that can happen, right? Multiple things can be true on one play. I thought as the game wore down, it was really the backed up drive, and C.P. happened to be in there. There's usually an adjustment that happens, depending how the game starts. I thought we got rolling there.

You know, we've got a strong commitment to the run game. Clearly Naj has been the lead carrier so far in the season. So as we get going in this thing and as you are mix-and-matching O-linemen there's a rhythm to the run game as well.

But, you know, you saw probably in the charter game, you could see them in sync, but that's something that we're continuing to work through just like you do every year. We need to be cleaner definitely earlier in the game.

Q. What's the next step you want to see this offense take with Justin?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think if we were to look at it, take a step back, we would have been more productive...



in-game decisions.

I think in 2020 we lost a bunch of tackles in Tennessee that year, but nobody cares. Everybody is dealing with something, and it's our job to figure it out and improve and make it work and win the game.

Q. How have you found Justin been at finding that happy medium between wanting to get the ball to George, the whole concept of him sometimes being open even when he's not but at the same time not forcing it? Has Justin been good in that regard?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, that's a trend around the league. I mean, you see it whether you are playing Dallas and CeeDee Lamb or some of the other guys they've got. Everybody has a guy. You wipe the ball, sometimes the coverage dictates, sprays around, whatever it is. Everybody has the same numbers.

Usually there's a natural evolution who your high-target guys are. They know that. Especially situational football, third down, two-minute, red zone, and you have to be able to move on. If they double somebody or the route is not clean, then to move on, and there is a fine line.

Sometimes you see guys hold to the ball too long waiting for a guy to come open, and it might not be the look you want, something happens and progress, and I think each week he's gotten better at that.

Q. What are you seeing out of your play action game so far? The average depth of target is pretty low. The amount of time that Justin is hitting checked-down or flatted is high. Is it because of pressure, or what he is seeing? What are you seeing?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think every snap tells a different story. There's a lot of talk about the shell defense. That's some of it, right? If you are going to play everything deep to short, you may not get those explosives that way.

I think you're seeing a little bit of a trend. A lot of teams are probably the last five years a lot of teams are relying on the hard play action, three-level throws trying to take those shots.

If you are playing everything disciplined deep to short, it forces you to check it down, which the defense wants. Sometimes they can be explosive. We've had our ops there.

Then you're looking at kind of the intermediate play action. Depends what they are playing there. So that can certainly take your yards per attempt down, and you have to find

different ways. They can't defend everything, and you have to be disciplined enough if that's what they're conceding to be efficient and to stay on track.

Then some of them, like at Denver, we had a couple of shots and things that may not show up in the stat sheet. There are certain players in this league, Micah Parsons being one of them -- Zach Allen, I don't think he got enough credit in Denver how many times he got you off the spot. He may not get the pressure, but if the quarterback has to move a little bit, he may miss the window for it.

There's a lot going on, and you just have to keep working through it.

Q. Justin, his passing yards have increased every week. He only has two turnovers. How much trust has he earned with you, and how much more does that maybe open up the playbook for what you're willing to let him try out there?

ARTHUR SMITH: Oh, I think there's a lot of -- again, going back to what some of your issues might be strategically in the game plan, when you are plugging new linemen in, how aggressive do you feel like you need to be depending how the game is going? That is not necessarily just about Justin sometimes. It's about what's going on around him as well.

But certainly week to week that's what you want to see, that improvement, that trust, the relationship that we have growing every day. That does fire you up. It's never going to be perfect.

There are things we all have to work on, but certainly I thought in that second half what was cool to watch as a coach and a play caller when somebody gets in that kind of flow, he damn near took the game over. When that happens and you feel it with a player, it doesn't matter what I called. You felt him rolling. That's what was such a bitter pill to swallow how the game ended.

Q. Along those lines, the three touchdowns, three consecutive touchdown drives, does that give you more confidence in your offense of what you would like to do or how they can...

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, absolutely. That's what you are trying to build every week. We have a young group. Again, we played a lot of different guys. That's what you want to see week in and week out. I always say the best teams are the ones that improve the most that are playing well at the end of the year, and you have to be in it to go for a top seed and the invitation to keep playing in mid-January. That's what we're striving for every week. I

thought you saw that.

Whatever the stats ended up -- I think it was around 400 yards -- we just need to be cleaner if there are different drives. We just hurt ourselves.

First drive, third down, you know, we were a little late. They jumped a snap. They got the roughing the passer. We got to take advantage of that. We have the personal foul. Drops us back. Stalled out the next one.

Those things in game being more efficient and more drives.

Q. How does Dallas's defense change without Parsons and Lawrence?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, that's week to week you have to prepare for guys that are the great players that they have. You better have a plan. If a guy is playing, if he is questionable, whatever, you don't want to speculate. You have two different plans.

But then if those guys aren't out there, they're going to rely on different people and may rely on different schemes. Obviously Mike Zimmer has been doing this a long time. He has a lot of different pressure packages, you know, different personnel groups he can throw at you to find ways to fill that gap.

Usually when you lose a great player or two, it's never one person's job. You may get creative on how you want to manufacture some of the pressures or run stopping ability.

Q. Freiermuth has 20 targets this year, 17 catches. Obviously very high completion percentage there. Is that something you maybe need to exploit a little bit more?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, certainly. Pat is a big part of every plan, and it goes back to sometimes how the game is going. You know, when you have some of those early games and the way it was going and we were more run-heavy, your target is obviously going to go down.

Pat is a huge part of every week, and some of it too is just the reps with the quarterback, the trust between player to player. That's going to naturally happen. You certainly saw that last week.

Q. You are seeing progress from Russ, and once gets back to a full practice, how long does that procedure take where he would be ready to play?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, that's a great way to package that

question. The answer to that -- that's more a question for Coach Tomlin; obviously the doctors. I joke that's what is more freeing about my job now. I don't worry about that stuff.

Mike and Gabe will give me the questions, whatever decisions they have to make, and my job is to execute the plan and get the orders, right? Mike tells me to take Vienna, take Vienna. I don't know if you get that reference.

Look, every player coming back, whether it's Pru or C.P. or Jaylen, as you work them back in, you have to have a customized plan of return to play, so that's kind of going on the side.

My focus is, all right, who is going to be up? How do we put the best plan to compete in Dallas Sunday night?

Q. I didn't understand the reference.

ARTHUR SMITH: Napoleon. Your French history, yeah.

Q. Going back to Justin Fields, the success he had last game during the second half, given that, is that reason to open up the offense more during the Dallas game coming up?

ARTHUR SMITH: Every week you want to score as many points. As I said, when you are looking at it like that, and you are not as efficient or productive, however you want to frame it, early in a game, it's really not about opening it up. It's about executing and getting in the drive to get more plays.

There's nothing will skew your numbers or make be you look conservative then short possessions, play count being down. I mean, it's just opportunities. That's why it's so critical to stay in drives, if you get first down on early downs or if you are winning third down, you know. We've been overall pretty good on third down. We haven't turned the ball over or given it to the other team, but we've had some plays that knock us off track, and that would certainly change it. When you are second and 18, you are trying to get back on track, that can affect it.

There's nothing that's on the call sheet that you don't have confidence. I wouldn't put it on there. A little too it's growth week to week. I promise you we're not trying to not open the offense up early in the games. We just have to do a better job overall.

So that's probably the best way I can answer that question. There's never been a discussion, Hey, don't let him do his job or don't, you know, let him go produce. I mean, it's improvement week to week. There's a lot going on is the



best way to answer that, if that helps.

Q. Can you talk to us a little bit as far as Justin Fields' freedom to make adjustments at the line and use switch plays if he sees a run blitz coming that you counter? What ways do you have to improve in that department when teams are trying to do things that might not fit the descript that you guys understood coming in?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think a lot of times you're watching games, even as a coach that's if it or a fan or whatever it is. I think that term audible at the line, you know, I don't know how many -- in today's NFL how many people are just -- I know you go back even in the history here. There were some coaches that the quarterback just called it at the line. I think the '70s I believe that they did that a little bit here. I know this he did it, Lombardi and the Packers if you go back and read some of that stuff.

The game is -- most plays every offense I've been in or package, whatever you will call it, you may call two plays. You have alerts. That's kind of become NFL 101. There's not anything where you say, Hey, let's go run into an ambush. No offense I've been a part of has ever been that hard-headed.

Without talking too much about scheme because I'm sure Dallas has some analyst or some quality control coach listening to this, so you don't want to give too much away, but every offense I've been a part of you are trying to take advantage of the looks you are given, however you do it. Sometimes it's running a run and maybe a run you have an alert, you know, a pressure thing. Those are all practice. So you never are just going up there with like a Cheesecake Factory menu, and then you say, Here you go, buddy, go take it, call what you want. That's not fair to the player. The clock is going, whatever.

Again, it's all in the preparation as you get into it week to week and guys get more comfortable. That's why we practice and what we're working for.

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