

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. What can you tell us about the rule towards Pickens, why his snaps were reduced?

ARTHUR SMITH: You usually go week to week with game plans. Obviously last week was -- we were limited possession, the way the game flowed. So it was our own doing, obviously not being as efficient.

We had been on third down. We had two shots in the high red zone in the second half, and we didn't convert for different reasons.

But you go into any game plan, certain players, how you try to package things, you try to maximize snaps. Different lifetime, but certainly we've done it with other premium players, done it with Derrick Henry. He wanted to be out there and play, and he went out there all the third downs and he got plenty of touches.

Did it with A.J. Brown early, certain things, tried to mix and match or maximize things or set things up, and that was limited early. He still played a majority of the snaps. He still, I believe, depending on what metric you're using, seventh in targets in passing downs or passing opportunities in the league.

I get it. You lose a game and something may look off or whatever, but it's not. We communicate to any player, whether it's Scotty or Van or Connor Heyward, you know the roles, got to know the backups, and how you package things. Those are week to week things. That's the best way I can answer it.

Q. You mentioned the other guys that have gone through this, and now George is kind of dealing with the snap management stuff. How do you manage the frustrations of a player, especially when they feel like maybe they should be on the field more or want more opportunities?

ARTHUR SMITH: I don't think that was -- again, I would never speak for another person, but I didn't sense any

frustration from the snap count. I think any time -- in the NFL, everybody handles emotions different trying to win games, but I didn't ever get that sense.

I'm not really sure the angle of that question, what you were asking.

Q. He was seen throwing his helmet on the sideline a couple times and just had other moments throughout the game where it looked like he had visible frustration.

ARTHUR SMITH: George is an emotional guy. He does that every game, maybe just it's high profile. I've had players who have tackles, we get a sack, wish he had ran the ball. We have guys that you throw it, wish he'd handed it off. As long as I've been in the league, I think, maybe things are more -- there's so many cameras out there, it's like you're working in The Truman Show.

I don't know if there's more -- people have been covering this game for a long time. If you could only go back in history and see some of the things that make you laugh and may be out of context.

But the most highly competitive guys I've had, you get to the point where you don't pay attention. You have direct conversation with the players and you get to know them, but I don't know. I don't know what the camera shows, what it doesn't.

I've certainly been guilty, regretfully, showing frustrations at times calling a game at an official, which is not what you want. Some of that stuff, I'll be honest, I don't even pay attention to it. You're just so hyper focused on trying to make adjustments and win the game.

Q. He was asked today what he has to do to increase his snap counts, and he said that's not on me, it's all up to Art. Is it all up to you, or is this also what Mike wants? Is it also by extension of his own play? Could he get more snap counts by the way he's playing?

ARTHUR SMITH: Again, he still played the majority of the snap counts, all those critical downs. You're talking a one game sample size of things, and I don't know the historical

record here. I don't know what philosophically changed. Maybe there was certain wideouts that played 100 percent of the snaps. Usually that doesn't happen and you do have outliers. So I don't know that reference point.

But anything we do is always talked about from the top down, Mike, myself, communicate to the players, no gray there. It's probably a reaction to how the game went, to be honest with you, but that hasn't been the case this year.

Sunday night was a little bit of an outlier, small possessions, things situationally to set up, tried to attack them, didn't hit the big plays. We had ops, didn't. A lot of variables involved in that, but that's the best way I can answer that. Again, everybody's got different perceptions, and I get it. When you lose, it's the stuff that usually happens.

Q. What are some of the things that Scotty and like Van, those guys, they played more than George. I think that's more so than a hundred percent.

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure, a lot of it was the heavier packaging. In that particular game plan, you try to lock them into certain looks. That's the give and take. Then again, where you are in the season, what you're trying to do, short term, long term, maximizing people's reps. Those things can add up.

Certainly a tight end is a little bit different than a receiver. That probably had more to do with that than anything else.

Q. There was a lot of confidence expressed by you and your players last week coming out of Indy that second half. Is there one thing you can put your finger on that didn't carry over, or was it Cheesecake Factory?

ARTHUR SMITH: Certainly. Yeah, I don't know, I didn't get any promos or coupons from them. The promotion didn't work, I guess.

In all seriousness, every game is its own story. The first series, came away with points, not seven, but when you talk about trying to start faster, we were certainly more aggressive. You talk about a game of inches, not hitting the play to Connor, whether he got hit at the last second and alters the throw, whatever. A number of things we tried to go after him early and ended up with three points.

We had a drive where we kind of did it to ourselves with a couple of procedure penalties. Like I said, it was a limited possession game. There's always give and take. They stopped doing some things they were doing early. Probably in reaction to some of the scheme things. We

adapted. That's what you saw a little bit different. That's every game, you've got to adapt.

I thought we adapted and obviously moved to a little bit cleaner the sec half, certainly the opening drive and that last drive to go ahead.

Q. Roman's nine consecutive full practices, yet he's been inactive obviously the last couple of weeks. What does he have to do to get a helmet on game days?

ARTHUR SMITH: I just think he keeps working. You're talking about a lot of time missed for a young player. He's working very hard, I would imagine it happens sooner or later, but it's not you've got to meet this certain metric. A lot of it is getting back into game shape.

You talk about a young player -- we have such a long way to go too. He's doing really well, making progress every day. I would imagine it will probably happen sooner rather than later. Again, you miss all of training camp, it's getting your legs back.

It's not like a guy that had played four games and he missed a week or two. There's a lot of football conditioning, and certainly for a young guy mentally too. Very pleased with the progress he's made, though.

Q. How did Russ look yesterday, and how does your job change this week in maybe preparing him for a different role?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, any player is similar, like Roman, had to do a lot of practice reps. Those guys turn to get back into game shape. So took some of the reps that Kyle Allen has been taking, just kind of see where it goes from there.

You've got day by day in the same category. It's not like a guy that played a full game or played the first part of the season and then missed a week and has something lingering coming from Sunday. It's different. They're all different, what you're managing. So just kind of have to take it day by day.

Q. Arthur, it's a five-game sample size now. How would you evaluate how Justin has done?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, like a lot of our guys, there's been some really good football played, and there's things that we've got to keep working on. He is unique in terms of in the modern era, a guy that's kind of old school, just tries to work on things, no drama with him. He doesn't try to live through his Avatar, created perception.

That's probably why he was so endearing to his teammates in Chicago. That's what I really enjoy about working with him. Extremely coachable, extremely bright.

And the same thing as a play caller. You can get in this business where people start making executions or rationalizing or blaming others, whatever it is, put whatever they want on social media, make sure certain narratives get leaked out. He's old school. The guy just wants to work, and that's what you appreciate about him.

Like all of us, there's things you've got to work on. Different things pop up week to week. That's why we practice. That's why we meet. I'm very pleased with him overall.

Q. Mike was talking about the need for more splash on Tuesday. Not having your most effective downfield threat in the game for 80, 90 percent of the snaps, does that limit those opportunities? Not having George in the game, does that limit your opportunities to create downfield splash?

ARTHUR SMITH: What did you say the percentage was he wasn't playing?

Q. No, I said -- he didn't play 90 percent. He played, what, 57 percent of the snaps. When his playing time is limited, does that limit your opportunities to make plays downfield?

ARTHUR SMITH: He was in on possession downs, and certainly he was down the grass, like he has been every week. I still think he's right up there in passing downs. I still think he has the highest percentage of downfield targets. Sometimes you don't get the look or the covers or the one-on-one matchup, and it takes you somewhere else.

But every week he is down the grass. Whether we hit him or not or whatever happens, those are things you work on. Just look at the overall route tree is the best answer for you, one that him and A.M. were down there and we had Calvin down the middle and it ended up being a late throw away down the sideline to Van. Depending on covers, that would be a down the grass shot.

Certainly on the outside you get man-to-man looks or if you're inside the slot, you get down the grass looks. Really the big issue is we were more aggressive with some of the coverage. We've adapted certain things. Yeah, we've had some good long drives, but historically you need explosives. It usually takes some of the pressure off you, instead of going long, 11, 12, 13-play drives, and that's

what we're working on.

We had some ops early, didn't hit them for a variety of reasons. That's why we get back to work, and that's the biggest part of my job.

Q. There was a play call on third down early, first drive you ran it, third and eight, ran the ops. Could you talk through that plan. Maybe also, when you're in that area of the field, how much are you talking to Mike about how close do I have to get to go for it on fourth down, things like that?

ARTHUR SMITH: Sometimes when it works, it's great. A little bit strategically, go back to Indy, a few other games, that field goal fringe area is usually a high pressure down, so you're playing the game here, especially early in there, about certain looks, seeing what they're doing. May have packaged something different, a look, they check out of it or whatever it is.

You also have the factor of, if you get it in -- which is not special anymore, but if you're fourth and two or less, you get a lot of go opportunities. Obviously we didn't get what we wanted. There's risk in every call. Maybe that was a little more risk averse, different than the Indy one. We didn't hit the hot, and we took the sac fumble.

You've got to live with those decisions. Obviously when it doesn't work the way you want, you wish you had done something else, and that's it.

But you're talking about late in the game, it's a chess match back with the coordinators. They're going to open up the pressure packages and break out the old Harrison Smith and do what he did to Dale Jones, with the double lane, three up the middle to try to light you up, those things back and forth.

Our biggest issue on third down was with the exception of the one third and 24, I believe we were pretty -- I wouldn't call it manageable, but just you're not in those high defense advantage. We didn't convert those, especially the two that we had, I believe, in the third quarter right on that fringe of at least you're in field goal range and you're talking about a three-point swing.

There's a lot that goes into it. That's a great question. Those are the things you've got to live with, and sometimes early in the game they change it. So a lot goes into it.

Q. Regarding your running game and just emphasizing efficiency you probably want to get to, is this something where you have to stay the course with what you're doing, or do you consider possible

schematic adjustments?

ARTHUR SMITH: We made some schematic adjustments, and when you look at the number of some of your core stuff and efficiency, and it goes back to the same thing in the passing game. You're not popping a lot of explosives. Certainly that's going to make you go, and that's why some of those drives have been the way they are. It's a combination of both working and having conviction, not being stubborn.

You've seen some of the design runs, depending on who we're playing and what the matchups are, the looks, defensive structures. So we have that kind of every week. But all over the place, whether it's the run game or the pass game, you need more chunk plays. History will always tell you that.

Part of the thing -- you just look at different offenses and just know the more explosive offenses, a lot of times there's certain players you've got, guys that are yards after contact or yards after catch guys, certainly the quarterback's best friend and certainly a play caller's best friend when you've got a guy that you may have a run block for five, six yards, maybe it's efficient and the guy pops it for 70 or 99, which I saw one time. Those are different.

You see that all around the league. I think that's why, when you can get those yards after -- sometimes an explosive, they are shot. You're looking at go ball schemed up down the field or you get a catch and run, the guy breaks a tackle and goes, those are -- you're looking for them any way you can get them.

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