

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Thursday, November 7, 2024
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. What do you like about Mike Williams? How can he fit in your offense?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, no, Mike has obviously been a very productive player in the NFL. I remember watching him coming out in the draft. I was in Tennessee. That was the year we took Corey Davis. Been on the other side of some big plays he's made.

But we're excited. Anytime you add a good player, we'll bring him along the right way, excited he's here. Obviously he's got a skill set that fits us. Big wide receiver. Willing to work. See where it goes.

Q. How does his addition help George, open things up maybe?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think we actually have pretty good speed. Van caught the one the other day. I don't know what that was. Calvin has made some big plays. We have some good team speed.

Mike is a big receiver. He's made a lot of 50/50 catches. Big presence in the run game. Like I said, we'll see where it goes. You make moves like that mid-season, we've got a pretty good thing going, and so hopefully he's value-added.

Q. When you have it going good, you add a guy, what are some of the benefits and challenges of doing that midstream?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's a good question.

Sometimes people get lost. Act like my 11-year-old playing Madden with the salary cap off, stockpile players. That's not real life (smiling).

There are a lot of great players out there. But the chemistry and fit, what I've learned over the years, matters. What a guy's role is going to be, different from the team he's previously been on. They got to earn their role, too.

Yeah, there can be some challenges if it's not done the right way. You have to be mindful of guys that have been here, guys that have been really doing well for us. Put a guy up that comes in midyear, you're taking reps from somebody else.

Q. What can we expect to see from him this week? Is there an assimilation week?

ARTHUR SMITH: There's a little bit of that obviously. You also have to be mindful, too, he didn't have a real off-season. He got hurt September I believe of last year. A lot of times guys coming out of a knee injury, Adrian Peterson was the outlier coming off the ACL.

Everybody is different. Different players. You could see it. It will get better probably week to week. Better question for him in that regard. You have to be mindful of that, as well.

San Diego, with the L.A. Chargers last year, goes to a new team in the off-season, now calendar year he's on his third team.

We just have to make sure he's ready to go and help us if he is up.

Q. You mentioned Corey Davis. Do you think Mike and George can do some of the same things you were able to do in Tennessee when you had Davis and Brown at the same time?

ARTHUR SMITH: Also been mindful of this. When you've coached great players, I'm always careful of comparisons because every player is unique. There's things that A.J. did that I've never had another guy be able to do. Same with George. Some of the body control things and catches down the grass. They're all unique. Certainly the big plays Mike's made, that adds an element to your offense.

So it's like I always joked when I got to Atlanta, I didn't show any Derrick Henry cut-ups. That's just not fair. There's certain schemes you want to run. But to say, Do it like Derrick, that's unrealistic. Can't take credit for the 17 stiff arms he'd have on a 90-yard run. Didn't try to do that.

Mike has a unique skill set. Have to integrate, play to his

strengths, understand our style of play, how we operate. Mindful of that.

Q. Parts of the run game have been going well. What has to happen to keep up on that trajectory?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's week to week. Continue to work for it. A lot of the recent success, that's been a work in progress all year. You saw some of it in Vegas certainly with Naj. We've had a lot of different guys in there up front. We'll have a new group. Zach is coming back.

It's a credit to the whole unit. You have to work every week at it. They're going to throw different schemes at it. When something is working well, you know they're working on that on the other side.

That will be a big part of this game on Sunday. The defense we're playing is an extremely fast defense. Two of the better inside linebackers in Bobby Wagner and Luvu. That presents different challenges. They've got really good team speed out there. Any Dan Quinn defense, got to play hard.

Good test for us. We're excited about it. Big-time matchup.

Q. What is the benefit of having Zach back?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, obviously Ron did a heck of a job stepping in there. Zach has been playing good football. I don't even look at him as a rookie. He's got such a good presence. We knew about him coming out of the draft how mature he was mentally. A guy that's been off for a couple weeks, now you have to integrate back in. Zach has been playing good football. We expect that to continue.

Q. Derrick Henry, some of the consistencies from the 2019 Titans team that you were a part of, what Najee is doing this year are very familiar. Are you seeing the same type of development or is it different?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's a little different. We all get recency bias. People forget, Derrick, when he was drafted, he backed up DeMarco Murray. He had a couple moments. In '18, it didn't start out well. He's gone on record about that.

Really it was the end of the '18 season, really that Thursday night game when he hit that 99 yarder, carried it to the next season.

Their careers have started different. I know it's a new scheme for Naj. He's doing a good job. But I think Naj has probably had more volume of carries than Derrick did to

this point. Different players.

Both those guys are really, really fun to coach. Like I said, I don't think anybody is in better shape than Naj is. You can see that consistency, those habits. Hopefully they'll continue. A lot of that work is paying off right now.

Q. Mentioned the inside linebackers. What else are the hallmarks that stick out to you on tape that makes Washington's defense part of what has been playing to their resurgence this year?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's a lot of things. I don't think they've played from behind very much this year all. When you really look at it, they've done a good job of getting turnovers. They haven't turned it over on the other side. That's probably the truest stat. The turnover margin is probably a good reason why we're 6-2, and they're 7-2.

They're very aggressive. Obviously they value team speed. The way the D-line, they get off the line of scrimmage, the way that they pursue the ball. Things that are all the staples of a really sound, good defense. That's a credit to Dan Quinn, Joe Whitt. That's been their style of play.

I think that's what pops out on tape is the team speed. When they've gotten a lead this year, they've made people pay. That's where a lot of their sack production is. They got a really good pressure package. That's a challenge this week.

Q. You talked about Najee a few times here. When production is there like the last few weeks (indiscernible)?

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure.

Q. Does that affect that usage, the things you might want to do?

ARTHUR SMITH: Without giving away too much strategy, that can happen. Certainly if somebody gets rolling in a drive. That happened in Indy with C.P. unfortunately that was a drive he got hurt. That can naturally happen.

Naj will be a big part of playing every week. C.P. has value, not only can he play running back, he can play other roles. Allows you to get more creative sometimes with formation, personnel-wise. C.P. is coming back, too. What the plan will be? Maybe this week, may change next week, all those things.

That can naturally happen in a game, for sure, if somebody is rolling.

Q. When you have someone like Russ, how much can you lean on him when you bring in a new receiver to get him up to speed?

ARTHUR SMITH: Really it's the whole group. Sometimes I think that gets probably way more attention than is really practical reality on the ground. There's so much.

A guy is new here. Shows up whenever it was, 48 hours ago, meeting everybody for the first time, learning the offense. Certainly it's important to get on the same page with the quarterback.

The way you got to work is all those guys. You can't just have one guy, Here do this for him. Then the consequences if a guy comes out of the game or he's not up. That's a constant work.

It certainly helps you when have a veteran. It's really about getting the whole group on the same page.

Q. Coming off of a bye week, moving into the second half, I'm sure you did the self-assessment of the offense. What is the biggest area that you would like to see improvement?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, there's a lot of things. But we try now. I think that's what has helped in this kind of digital age we're in now. A lot of times the bye week you kind of pause, you really do a deeper self-scout.

The information is available faster now, whether you want to call it analytics. Football has been doing that, you go back to history, quality control, guys splicing up the film, breaking the game down. They just didn't - rest in peace, Billy Beane - but nobody monetized it.

I would argue football was ahead of the curve in the way that these old coaches were breaking games down, looking at situations, numbers, down and distance. Nobody took advantage of that. Certainly that analytic revolution took off. In football, the data and the stats, that's always critical.

Used to be a little slower moving I guess is the best way to answer that. But we do a good job, our personnel, analytic department. It allows you on Monday and Tuesday to do a lot of self-scouting week to week.

The bye you take a breather. You can watch more film, self-scout. You're really cognizant of it. We just got a lot of work to do.

Just because we played well recently, coming off a bye, the real season begins now as you get in there. Whatever

you're doing well, you know teams are going to try like hell to stop you. You have to make sure you can counterpunch and keep honing your craft.

That's exciting. It's nice that you're 6-2. We know history, now the real season begins.

Q. What has Russ provided to this offense in the last two starts for him that was maybe different than your first set of weeks?

ARTHUR SMITH: Just different players. I don't know. I mean, like I said, playing good football. But I think the offense, too, some of the benefit is as we were growing, the question about the run game, I think there's a lot of things why we played better. Credit goes to a lot of people, not just the Q. That's not taking anything away from him, but that's the reality of it.

Again, just like when we added Mike, you want to play to a guy's strengths. Certainly that's what we're trying to do with Russ. He's doing a good job with it. We're trying to do it with all those guys, Darnell. McCollum. When Zach is back. That's a challenge week to week.

Q. When you have different running backs or come into a different offensive line, do you have to kind of learn what guys are better at, what calls, player in the game, personality? Is that part of the development of the running game?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's a big part of it, too. Like I said, I try to pride myself, I'd say the numbers back it up. Fortunate to be part of some good rushing attacks. It's been different. The way we ran the ball in Tennessee was completely different than especially when we were rolling in '22 in Atlanta.

We became more of a zone read team. We were doing a little more wide zone. I tried not to be too rigid. You don't want to get stale. There's a lot of things I've tweaked here to try to play into those strengths, try to enhance it.

Essentially you have to be mindful of that. You don't want to ask a player, you're left tackle, just because you did something with LaJuan and Saffold or Lindstrom and McGary, they're all different. So yeah, absolutely.

Thank you.

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