

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

Thursday, November 14, 2024
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA

Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Arthur, I know it's easy to say we'd like to involve the tight end more or should go to the tight end more. Would you like to get Pat a little bit more involved in the passing?

ARTHUR SMITH: Obviously every game has a different story, and those guys -- everyone bends at times. When you put the plan in, you try to make sure you've got enough for everybody to be the primary. Sometimes we call things, and maybe coverage or pressure doesn't do exactly. Defense has a say. That's why you've got to build in reads and progressions.

I think Pat's had a good season. Obviously sometimes the numbers and targets. That's why we scheme him up in the red zone. We trust him. Made that good play in there. Got that DPI. We tried to get him the ball early, got the DPI. That doesn't count as a target. He touched the ball.

We've got a lot of guys that can make plays. That's a good problem to have. You want guys that -- you want players that everybody wants the ball. What I have problems with is a guy doesn't want to work, and we don't have that issue thankfully.

A lot of it dictates full game, try to get everybody involved. Naturally obviously George has gotten a heavy amount of targets. He gets open a lot.

Same way when I was in Tennessee. You try to -- so you don't become too obvious, try to spread the ball around. Naturally you look at it. Derrick and A.J. usually got the ball a lot, but I do try to give everybody the ball.

Q. Arthur, we assume you know Henry's Achilles heel, and you've passed that along?

ARTHUR SMITH: I don't know if Derrick has one. It's strange seeing, watching some of the cut-ups and seeing the team meetings, it's a little weird for me to see him in purple. Just because some of the big matchups we had, nothing like the rivalry obviously, going into Sunday with

the history of Steelers and Ravens.

We had some battles when I was in Tennessee. It's a bit strange to see him in purple. Obviously he's the enemy on Sunday, but it was a privilege to coach him. He should be a first ballot Hall of Famer. Of all the great players, I don't know of an Achilles heel for Derrick.

Q. How does a 250 pound guy have so many home runs?

ARTHUR SMITH: I don't think in the recent history of the game I've seen anybody with some of the stats he's had. I believe -- fact check me, but I believe he's the only player in the history of football to run for 2,000 yards in high school, college, and the NFL, which is rare.

I wish I had an answer for you, but he's definitely a special player.

Q. Arthur, this is sort of a part A and part B to this, but when you go up against a team that scores at the rate that Baltimore does, do you go in with the mentality that we might have to score -- we have to score with them, sort of blow to blow? And then second part of that, do you feel more equipped to do that now than you did at the start of the year?

ARTHUR SMITH: It felt good earlier. Obviously a lot of different things, things are new, they may not go the way you want. So you have to adapt in the flow of the game.

I think earlier in the year certainly a little more concerned with some of the things on the road, some of the issues, a lot of new players, guys get familiar, trying to play sound situational football. It won us the game in Atlanta, Denver, some of the ball control stuff. Obviously you want to score more than 30 points a game.

You get in a matchup like this, that's why probably their numbers have been skewed one way or the other. They've had a great offensive year so far. Teams are down several possessions, and naturally you have a little bit more passing yards in soft coverage. Guys, they go about their possessions and the quarterback may throw for 300, but it was kind of irrelevant.

If you look at their numbers, defensively they're top of the league in rush defense, and they're bottom of the league in pass defense. They've got a good unit. Again, a lot of that is due to some of the plays. They're a great tackling team. You don't see a lot of explosive runs get hit. On the same side, they haven't had a lot of rushing attempts either because of how their offense has played in explosive ability.

Every game our job is to outscore their team's offense. A lot goes into games like this. It feels like a playoff game as much as it can feel in the regular season. So I'm excited to be a part of it.

Q. Through the first three quarters of the Commanders game, Russ wasn't as accurate on the deep balls as he had been the prior two games. What do you learn about his ability to make in-game adjustments that he bounced back in the third quarter, and how does it help the offense that he continues to take those deep shots?

ARTHUR SMITH: Different because we made a couple plays right before the half, and second half -- his first start, he started slowly. Russ, you've got to give him a lot of credit. He does a great job of staying positive. You look around the league, and some people let their emotions of the first two series go, and he's always had a unique ability for that. My experience with him and everything I've heard and seen from afar, it's nice to have that steady presence.

I thought really similar issue on Sunday, a little bit you've got to give the Commanders credit. Play our style the way we do, you get a little different looks. The way people tried to defend the run.

I didn't think it was our cleanest game in terms of efficiency. I thought we were too boom or bust. But I thought the fourth quarter we started to wear them down. I thought we made plays in critical moments in the red zone and certainly on third down. The play at the end, even the fourth and one, to not have to put Corliss back out there and punt it, it was good situational.

There's always things to work on, and that's why you have to be objective. You can't get too proud of yourself if you win a game like that because there's always things you've got to fix. That's why you've got to be sober minded and really objective. We have things we need to work on, but we need to be really efficient. I thought we were a little cleaner for the most part against both New York teams.

That's our job. In a game like this, we need to play more efficient.

Q. You mentioned the Ravens secondary and how the numbers might be skewed. What are you seeing from their secondary in terms of what they're doing strong but also any areas that they're possibly weak at as well?

ARTHUR SMITH: I just think they're going through, they've got a standard of defense. Go back to Brian Billick probably and a lot of different coordinators, Ozzie Newsome and them, give them a lot of credit for the way they drafted the last 20 years. Playing Baltimore, they have a standard over there. You've seen that evolve.

Obviously they've got a new play caller this year, Mike gets hired out to Seattle. Like I said, their strengths have been different. Some years they've been a little more man heavy, depending on their personnel. Obviously Dean Pees came out of retirement for the 50th time. He's back there.

But you see some coverage principles that have been true year over year, different players. I think it's a combination of a lot of things, and it's a good defense. They play well. It will be interesting as it always is. That's how they've done things. They've got a new play for you. You've got to adapt and practice to make sure, hey, get this look, they're going to have a counter punch. If you go into a game without realizing that, you'll get exposed quick. So you've always got to have respect for that.

It's a huge matchup. It is fun to be a part of it, especially this point in the season.

Q. How did you sense your young offensive line in Broderick, Zach, Mason, in their first game coming out of the bye, especially Zach coming off injury and Broderick having struggles earlier and appearing to have a strong game?

ARTHUR SMITH: Broderick is a tough young player. He played pretty well. Zach didn't look like he missed a beat. And Mason's really coming along. When James Daniels went down, James had been probably our most consistent physical player in finish. Mason is kind of the finish game for us.

It's good. It's good to see those young guys, their habits they build. It's been a positive.

Q. The way Mike told, and I think Russ too, the winning touchdown, it was sort of -- it was supposed to be Calvin. Two-part question. How much is that designed for certain receivers or all receivers know where they go? Secondly, and Mike to a point too,

have the latitude as veterans to kind of do that, to change things in that sense where maybe a rookie quarterback wouldn't be able to do that?

ARTHUR SMITH: No, that's a lot of work that goes in the week. When you've got a plan for a guy, you always have contingency plans, depending on how many receivers you're dressing and whatnot.

Obviously Mike being new, backup this spot. Depending on the play sometimes, you do a little bit -- you see them doing in flag football. You audible them up, hey, Mike, remember this is what this route is. You're not going to be the Z or X here. You're going to be the F on the counter play, but this is all you're running.

You know about the play, and a lot of that's communication and how you practice in the week. A lot of that with Russ is what's so important is daily communication and the time that Russ and I spend. That's why Tannehill and I got so close. We spend so many hours that sometimes my wife FaceTimes me to make sure I'm not somewhere on the South Side, I'm with my offense. No, here's Russ on Friday night talking through those situational things, red zone, what I call.

That's all planned on the call sheet. So that was a combination of a lot of things. I have a call that backed up with Calvin early in the game just the way they were playing trying to get us the matchup and trying to get a big play, and we didn't get it. It's something that Russ and I talked about, here's what we like in those situations.

So when we huddled up, you're moving one guy. So instead of having to move Van and then really moving two, put Mike in there in that spot. Instead of moving Van to Calvin, hey, Mike. That's been kind of his history and a good route for him. Both of those guys did a helluva job.

Q. So in communications with Russ, there was outside talk about his coachability. How have you found him in those situations, and how willing is he to learn new things?

ARTHUR SMITH: Very well. That's a lot of work. When we started working together, every player I've ever had is unique. Certainly that spot, a lot of different personalities. That's made me better as a coach. I think sometimes -- it's not anybody's fault, but you get on a run with a great quarterback, and there's only -- you only know one way to do it.

Sometimes because of that added attack, there's been times certainly you could argue it's been frustrating or whatever, it doesn't matter. That's forced me to be a better

coach. Every quarterback they've dealt with has been totally different. Going back to Marcus or Tannehill, Matt Ryan, Marcus again, Ritter, Heinicke, now Justin, Russ, all the other guys in those rooms, you've got to have a plan because it's not one size fits all.

Like anything, it's a good relationship. You just have to have honest communication. Sometimes you agree to disagree, and that's okay. I like debate, usually with a veteran. Again, once you get to know people, you kind of earn each other's respect and trust, you start seeing results like that, and we need that to continue.

He's been fantastic, so has Justin and Kyle. That's why you always take it with a grain of salt. A lot of stereotypes you put on people until you have your own experience and you get into a season with them, and you find out. He's been phenomenal in that regard.

Q. Just seeing that throw, that throw from Russ over the years and how uncanny is it that he's able to do that?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's his strength. It's like you've got to -- if you had a pitcher that can throw a 100 mile an hour fastball, that's his fastball. You're trying to play to his strengths. I've been on the other side of it.

Hell, I remember being a GA, and we didn't offer Russ -- it's a funny story. He came on a visit. I was a GA at UNC. Frank was our OC. Frank had a lot of conviction on him. He ended up with his brother Kurt at NC State. We didn't offer him, but he came in for camp and lit it up.

I knew a lot about him. I remember watching him in the Senior Bowl. Saw him at NC State, Wisconsin. So I've seen him a lot. I've been on the other sideline and playing Seattle and seen him. His unique ability, like all these guys, they have different talents. It's cool to see it going again and him being on our team.

Q. We've heard a lot about the Justin Fields package, but we have yet to see it. How much do you guys enjoy some of the gamesmanship aspect of forcing an opponent to prepare for something that they may or may not see on a Sunday?

ARTHUR SMITH: We've got a package every week, and sometimes it goes back to the flow of the game. Obviously being smart with Justin. He's had a little bit of a hamstring, so that went in a little bit to the decision-making, but he'll be ready to go when we need him. Maybe it's Sunday. Maybe it's next Sunday.

Very confident, when we break it out, it will make a



difference.

Q. Who was Carolina's quarterback when you decided not to offer Russ?

ARTHUR SMITH: I was just a GA. Instead of just name dropping guys, it looks like I'm taking a shot. But Russ not going to UNC and a couple other events led to T.J. Yates being an NFL player. I used to joke with T.J. that Russ going to NC State, I think T.J. Yates was a late add. Butch Davis took over. T.J. had a pretty good run and made a career in the NFL and now he's coaching.

FastScripts by ASAP Sports

