

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. How have you seen things change in the back end with the defense? Anything different?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, a little bit. You know, going in the to last game, obviously having a lot of history with Dean Pees, you could start to see just the trend that was going on going into our game and just the language coming out of there.

You've just been around this long enough, knew they were going to adapt some of the things they were doing before. We had kind of prepped to see really how they played us. It wasn't some wholesale change. Just maybe less aggressive in coverage.

But you certainly see Dean's influence the longer he's been there. They've done a good job. Any good team you adapt. Something is hurting you, you got to change it or find different ways to coach it.

They've kind of settled into some roles and played really good defense the last couple weeks.

Q. Last game, kind of funny the way that 5'9" Calvin Austin comes to the defense of the 6'7" Darnell Washington. What stuck out to or what did you learn about Calvin's Austin's toughness that maybe you didn't know?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, I knew Calvin was tough. He's from Memphis, a little partial to him. I knew that coming out. Knew a lot about him being from Memphis myself and my brother played in that program; pretty close to that program.

So we want to draft him when I was in Atlanta, and then obviously Pittsburgh took him. I was excited when I got here for the opportunity to work with him. Doesn't surprise me when you're wired like he is.

You know, that play, I mean the biggest thing that bothers me on that play is regardless of what happened after that,

we got to be smarter when the journey is over. I mean, we won't be physical so won't be a band of pirates and do things that hurt the team.

Ultimately's journey is over, we got the ball on the floor, and we got a slow start. You know, know it's a long game and you got a real opportunity to put seven on there and you get seven yards, and it's all subjective.

But we did it to ourselves, being in that situation. That's the thing. Darnell, it's all the guys that played really hard. There is a fine line. If you're caught in that BS that led to that, the journey was over.

So take it to the wall. You know, could have just dumped them in the end zone and line you had up and played from the floor and see what happened. So then you're a second and a mile, third and a mile; set for three. Those are the situational stuff. There was a lot of things in that game we have to improve.

Sometimes it could be a good readjustment. Things are going your way and things you're talking about and you're coaching, sometimes maybe takes a tough lesson a because you got to get ready. We got a huge matchup Saturday.

Q. What's caused some of the struggles in the run game?

ARTHUR SMITH: I wouldn't call it struggles. If I look at it objectively, it's all really people's perception. We're towards the top of the league in rushing. Sometimes not as efficient as you want, but you know, I think biggest thing, if you watched us closely, it's really all the way around.

We've got to do a better job with. We're like an old pickup truck. We'll run well. We're pretty damn good the longer -- you get the thing in drive sometimes it just takes a little while to crank the engine.

We got to get some jumper cables or whatever we got to do. I'm not a mechanic. Maybe somebody around here is. We're like an old pickup truck sometimes where we just plod along and then we get going and we have some really



good drives and play some explosive football.

Obviously we've won ten games. I look at it more as that. You look at it, every play of football, the nuances are what makes it fascinating. Some of the runs, like we have them on a couple gaps, somebody rolls out of that or we got leverage or we're a little tight here.

So that hole could've driven an old pickup truck through, and now becomes a one-yard gain, and that's not efficient and that's not good enough.

That's what we got to be better at from the jump. You know, if you want to go far in the playoffs, I mean, those are the stuff you got to fix. We got to be improving. Got to play well, and obviously play well enough to win Saturday.

Q. I know you have confidence in all your receivers, but teams markedly defend you different when George isn't out there.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, in certain aspects. Same thing if you're playing with a new center or put the third tackle coming in. They change the rush plan. Those are games within the game all over the place.

Certainly probably changes their calls schematically, and that is your job. Nobody cares. Nobody is feeling sorry for you on the other side. You have to have the mindset nobody is coming to rescue you.

I think sometimes in this league you want your best players out there. When they're not, what are you going to do about it? I think sometimes people fall into that victimhood of complaining and whining. That ball is kicking off 4:30, whatever time on Saturday, and we got to go win. We got to be better at the things we can all do.

Sometimes change up some scheme things or sometimes just simple as executing a better block up front or running a better route or delivering a better ball.

A lot goes into it. Obviously like to have everybody. That's not the reality. You got to find a way to problem solve.

Q. Najee hadn't been charged with a fumble on that play and hasn't had one this season. How out of character was that for him, and how much does that change the confidence you have in running that play?

ARTHUR SMITH: No. I mean, that can happen on any play. If there is something you do schematically that exposed somebody and you try to get too cute and don't account for somebody and right at the mesh point you get blown up, well, that's negligence or lack of execution.

Somewhere along the way you got really messed up.

On a routine play, whether you hand the ball and there is different schemes and different reasons why, I think you're seeing more -- we've done it in the past. You see that kind of trending. Seeing it a lot over the league.

It's probably the way defenses are playing teams that are trying, whether you're running outside zone or true pin-pull, old school transportation plays. You can't crack toss anymore. That's what you kind of see. Those are routine plays.

Doesn't change my confidence in Naj. He's a very dependable player. Nobody wants to screw up. Obviously at that time of the game they're all critical. When you're in limited possession game it gets magnified. 20-13 on the 26; you're thinking worse case we need a touchdown, and worse case make it 20-16. That's points off the board. Wasn't like there was a punch out or something they did. That's a self-inflicted.

I got all the confidence in the world in Naj. That's a different matter. Everybody will make mistakes. You sit there and try to bury somebody over it, that's not good leadership either.

Q. You guys are probably one of the I think 12th or something in third downs; pretty good third down team. The numbers are pretty low when it comes to first down running and...

ARTHUR SMITH: Sure.

Q. How much work is going into becoming more efficient on first down?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, it's how you cut it up. It gets magnified when you lose a game, but you're aware of things. Like I said, it doesn't count any different whether you score on third down or fourth down or first down. Every play I want to be efficient. Whether it's first or second down, those are subjective arguments.

Statistics get magnified. Certainly there is a trend. What I really look at for different reasons, and not to bore you to death or make excuses, but we got to start faster. We've done a lot of different things. Some games we have and then we have to settle for a field goal.

Some games, like I said, can't get that thing cranked up quite yet, and when you do, you start rolling. We need to be -- obviously every week you would like it to be like Cincinnati other than that third down pick. We move the ball, imagine our efficiency numbers were pretty damn

good that day.

It's a week-to-week challenge. We're always looking. But any time we snap that ball, you know, you're looking to maximize that play; other than when you're in victory formation or in four-minute trying to milk the clock and not score a touchdown.

That would be the only time.

Q. ... mentioned that he feels like the adjustments in the Ravens defense means they're trying to limit the explosive plays. What is it about Russ and his feel for when to try to hit the deep ball? What have you maybe learned about his feel for the game and knowing when to push it down versus when to not try to hit those homerun balls?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's always a fine line. You're talking about guys, different strengths. If you got a great three-point shooter, you know, there are times where they're defending that, take the layup or whatever you're doing, they can pass.

But you don't want to -- I guess where I'm going is there is a fine line. If somebody does something really well you want to lean into it, but knowing when it the right time not to launch one for the logo. So I think he's done a good job. Obviously got a lot of reps in this league.

That's going to be a game within a game every week depending how people are playing you.

Q. Russ over the years, despite his height, of avoiding getting passes batted down the line of scrimmage. When teams do get a few, is that usually a result of...

ARTHUR SMITH: Just want to go on record. You said that, not me.

Q. I feel like I can always bring up Mike.

ARTHUR SMITH: Okay. Make sure I'm not going to get canceled or people get angry because a reference to Russ' height.

No, but in all seriousness.

Q. When teams do get a few, is that because they're solely concentrated? How do you combat that?

ARTHUR SMITH: Certainly. That's a credit to him. I mean, you look at him -- people talked a lot about Drew Brees or Russ, whatever, they're not 6'4". Those guys adapt and they're really outliers, the success they've had at

passing the ball. I mean, that's because if you just look at -- when take the stats you're asking about, you take the total number, history says there is not lot of guys that have done that at that high a level for a long time.

That's a credit to him and just the way he's always played sports. He's a great athlete. Great baseball player. They figure it out. If you really watch them, you see that. Same thing you saw in high school, NC State to Wisconsin to Seattle, to now here. That's been a huge strength of his.

Probably a better question for him. Watching him from afar and studying athletes, he has that concentrated spatial awareness. Every play is a little bit different.

He has to adapt and move in the pocket to see lanes. Certain guys that are a little bit taller, maybe they throw over the top of things. The way he slides in the pocket, all kinds of things. Sometimes balls get batted. Yeah, have to adjust. Other times you look at it, the pocket may have collapsed, too. You could be 6'8" and the ball could have been batted. That's a credit to him and how he's succeeded and what he's done.

Q. Talking about the struggles warming up the truck and things like that, are there common threads you're able to see, hey, maybe the run game or certain common things other teams are doing that lead to those struggles or has it been a popcorn, one thing here and there, week to week?

ARTHUR SMITH: Been like popcorn. Easy thing is when you -- you identify the problem. If there is a different problem every time, all right, you're saying our job is to find that solution.

That's what we are tasked to do and need to do.

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