

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Other than Russell's two turnovers, do you feel like that game plan was pretty much executed the way you wanted it to go?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, I thought we moved the ball pretty well at times. A lot of different people got involved. There were things we did changing things up trying to give him looks he had seen and then give him something that wasn't; unscouted looks kind of opened some things up, starting with the second series that played to Skowronek. It was good to see multiple guys get involved.

But going back to that, I mean, there is always outliers, but at the end of the day most games are decided by the turnover margins. If you really look at our last two weeks, when we had opportunities to take the momentum, whatever it's been, that's cost us. We've been pretty good all year, but obviously last two weeks it's hurt us.

Q. Mike said yesterday that George has a really chance to play this week. How do you prepare for some of that uncertainty? What do you do if you do get him back?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, obviously he's been our leading wide out; been one the better wide outs around the league the whole season.

That certainly helps. You want your best guys out there if they're available, and so if he can go, nice to have him back.

Q. Any message you took from how you guys ran the ball pretty officially with Najee and Jaylen on Saturday, things that you're capable of doing moving forward?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, absolutely. With Jaylen it's been him getting healthy. I don't care how many years you play, there is a buildup when you miss time; guys getting back into a rhythm. That's natural in football.

Going back to the pre-season, when guys miss time it takes a couple weeks. Good to have both of them rolling. The play time got a little skewed because we were down a couple possessions in the fourth quarter, so it was sort of a hurry-up -- you know, Jaylen was in there more.

I think we were like 4-7 a carry. Again, didn't possess the ball enough. They had a say in some of that and other things we did to ourselves. I thought we ran the ball pretty efficient most of the day.

Q. You mentioned got the ball out to lot of different guys in the last game. Pat Freiermuth though didn't necessarily have the same targets that he's had for a lot of the season. What's behind that? Were they doing something to take him away?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, whenever they started the target thing, it's just not a reality of how the game is played. I only say that, you know, because I think Pat -- and you can ask him this; this isn't just coach-speak -- you're the primary on a lot of things, obviously the coverage dictates a lot. And then other than things, if the quarterback sees something and likes a better matchup, that's where the ball goes.

You know, Pat, I think a little bit helped us I would say in recent weeks. Pat has been pretty damn good in the red zone. Guys get the game plan. It's not like you're icing somebody out. It's just whether the ball finds them or not.

May be the primary, may get a different look, something they break down, guy gets off schedule where you're not necessarily going to the primary target.

I think Pat's had an excellent season.

Q. How do you keep him from getting frustrated where the kind of ebbs and flows of the season in a league where he might have a touchdown and in a league might have just two targets?

ARTHUR SMITH: I mean, they're around the right guys. Pat is the right guy. I get it. Everybody wants to score, but you start worrying about that and you're losing games like that you got a bunch of selfish guys and you're not going to

have a challenge.

Q. Are you seeing defenses rolling more coverage in Pat's direction?

ARTHUR SMITH: Not necessarily rolling coverage. When we were inside, I mean there are few people -- I can think of some outlier game plans. We did it to Mike Evans in the second Tampa game. We were kind of doubling no matter what. Calvin Johnson was the quality control coach. You're rolling the coverage and you getting some funky looks, that's not necessarily it.

I know a lot of that is a narrative. The ball is spread around. We moved it pretty well, but that's -- those special coverages, I mean, sometimes get a guy wide open, we don't get the protection check, made us hot. We had Calvin and Pat for the third down and he's the primary, and we're off the field.

That's just a small example. So much goes on every play. It's not as obvious what you're seeing. I mean, you get man coverage or one-on-one, five-man pressure, then you got nothing but one-on-ones with the four eligibles out there in the back of the backfield. That's not necessarily what was happening.

Q. Chris Jones, what makes him as disruptive as he is and is there anything that you're able to do if he's not able to go that you otherwise would not be?

ARTHUR SMITH: I mean, one of the great pressure players in the league. Obviously the guy has been a great player for a while now.

I mean, I just think back in some of the matchups got into with him in the 2019 season. One of the rare guys that can rush inside and out. I think he's a problem. Gets one-on-one in the tackles; unique length. He has a fast get-off. He's got length. He's got power.

He's a disruptive player, so there are certain things you try to game plan for them. Obviously if he's not in there they'll have another plan. It's a really good defense. They been playing really good defense last couple years at Kansas City.

They're aggressive. It's going to be a challenge.

Q. You're facing Patrick Mahomes this week. How important is it for the offense to win time of possession?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think it's important most weeks.

Q. More specifically this week.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, just going back the last two weeks, we played two really good offenses and we lost the time possession and the turnover margin, and that's been an issue. Haven't had the result we wanted.

So when you're playing Kansas City, it's another obviously great player, quarterback. You limit the shots on goal, it's certainly in your favor as a team.

Q. As you're watching tape of Russ on his fumble, are you watching and say, we need you to get down there? Do you want him to trust his instincts and be aggressive?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's a fine line. I think Russ can probably speak on that more. Certainly when you get into the open grass as a quarterback you don't want to put yourself in harm's way. Guys make a play and make a split-second decision and protect yourself.

You know, he was the first to say that. So wasn't some major coaching point. Hindsight is 20/20. Got to protect yourself.

Q. Russ has been in the league a long time, experienced different things. When you hit a bump in the road here late in the season, where do you see some of his leadership and experience show through?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think for all of us, we're going to find out a lot about us. You don't want to hit adversity, but we've got a playoff spot locked up, trying to win the division, trying to win a game. It's easy for everybody to be great vibes and everybody smiling when you're winning, but you're going to find out a lot about us in how we respond.

That's the truth of the matter. We're playing good teams and we got a huge matchup, unique schedule. We'll kickoff 1:00 and be ready to go. Same thing you asked me. Nobody is around here pouting. If anything, it should heighten your focus and some of these issues, you know, that may have overlooked -- not overlooked, but there is a heightened level of focus.

Like I said, we'll find out.

Q. The last three games you went three and out on the first... How closely did you script those early plays and do you do anything differently given the recent lack of success?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, look, why a drive doesn't work, I

mean, certainly sometimes it what you called it, and sometimes it's really execution. Same route Calvin caught for a third down we had in the first one. We were clean operating. I mean, we started that game backed up, kind of get it off the goal line there.

Kind of have what you want that first third down, and we don't operate cleanly. So if we had converted, got to retry it, but obviously felt good about the scheme there.

But I mean, it's been that way most of the year. When the drive breaks down a lot of times it's the execution, and there are certain times you say, all right, wish I called this.

We were trying to be aggressive. Here is a perfect example: First play of the game was Skowronek, but you're going to change it when you're backed up on the two, so you go to a different situation that's really not part of your opening thoughts.

You're trying to go down and score. We didn't get that done.

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