

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Is it as simple as saying that you played three of the best teams in the NFL over the last three weeks and learned some things, some areas where maybe you've regressed and you have to correct those before Saturday?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, you know, a couple things. Obviously when you get in the game, every week is a big matchup. We played three good teams in a short stretch. Things that hurt you, you get chances, got to close the gap or take momentum back. I think about Baltimore, tie ballgame, early in that game, the turnover in the red zone.

Kansas City, you know, a couple things early. Obviously the momentum swing points off the board. That hurts you every week. But when you're playing really good teams and you're in these playoff-type atmospheres, that's usually the difference. That's yuck chop stats up however you want to. At times I thought we ran the ball pretty well the last two weeks but doesn't mean anything when you give points away and we're not clean operationally, and that's times when we've lost. That's been an issue.

Q. When Russ is at the line, if he wants to change the play or not, is that working out to your satisfaction? Are you happy with the way that's going?

ARTHUR SMITH: They are all built in. There's no, hey, you can get to anything. That just doesn't happen in the modern NFL. Maybe a few people here or there but you build in, I mean, things are packaged. So certainly a defense can fool you, and you don't get into it. Not every play is like that but just the way you package things, that's not -- that really has not been an issue. More it's been execution. Sometimes the details of things.

Q. Wilson has started practicing. How could he impact you offensively and how soon could that be?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think you take it, really, week-by-week. Hopefully we are playing long enough, if it becomes an option, that's up to Mike and the trainers. I do like what the

NFL has done with the expanded practice squad, the elevations, the return to play, the IR, certainly allows guys like Roman and Logan and Cole, especially here at the end of the year, it gives you a lot of roster flexibility, and at worst, if the opportunity is not there, you get those guys practicing.

So we'll just see.

Q. As far as Cincinnati goes, I know they are kind of in the same boat that you were a few weeks ago. They are playing a bunch of playoff teams, except for Denver, the last three weeks, but where has their defense gotten better?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, really, they have got a lot of turnovers lately. They have capitalized on it. You know, Cleveland got in a similar situation that we did against Kansas City. They had a touchdown callback holding. Two plays late. I think it was like 17-6 early in the fourth. Got a chance to cut it possibly to three. Calling for two, whatever. Either way, you have a chance to make it a one-possession game. Negative play and two plays later, I think they got picked.

It was almost identical to what happened to us in Kansas City. Get a touchdown called back and we threw a pick the next play. They have done a good job taking the ball away. That's probably the biggest difference when you've seen them. Some of their key players have been out. Lou does a great job, and you could see every week, he's got different packages up there. They have been playing really good football.

Q. Russ has had a couple red zone turnovers in the last couple weeks that have been uncharacteristic, how do you help him walk that fine line of not pressing and making mistakes, which is taking those chances to get some explosive plays?

ARTHUR SMITH: Obviously risking any call, right. You're going down there, and sometimes it's just, you know, I used blackjack analogy, like you lose a hand. You don't start splitting bad cards or doubling down when you shouldn't or whatever it is and try to win it all back the next play. If the opportunity is there, sure, take it.



But sometimes I think it's human nature, you get a negative play, like we get knocked -- you get the touchdown off the board and now you're second and long, and you see that sometimes, too. There is a fine line. You don't want to take somebody's initiative away but you get in these tight games against good defenses, they are not going to hand you things. There's an art to not forcing things when they are not there. It's not being conservative. It's trying to play smart football.

Q. Seems like they were trying to confuse Russ, lining up one way and moving another. How do you prepare for when teams are going to set up certain looks and create other opportunities and keep to your game plan?

ARTHUR SMITH: They have been showing him -- they play so much shell. They have got a really good DB group. You know, a lot of that stuff, even when they pressured, they are doing a lot of shell and rolling. I thought they did a good job, and then some of it, you have to win at the line of scrimmage. I think Duffy is a hell of a player. I don't think he gets talked about enough. He did a nice job, and the three safeties they play with.

But we anticipated it going in. We have a ton of respect. You do every week. But that to me was the strength of their team.

Q. How do you perform better?

ARTHUR SMITH: You go back and debrief or call it an after-action report and talk about lesson the learned. Hopefully we are playing those guys again at some point. Obviously they may have a new wrinkle here or there but those are lessons learned. You go in, prepare. You know they will something new -- and they will adapt, too, just like in the Cincy game, they changed some of their stuff in the second half. So you don't want to make the same mistake twice.

Q. On Russ's pick, what were the route concepts? How was that play supposed to work?

ARTHUR SMITH: I appreciate the question, I'm sure asked a bunch, but not that. Lessons learned. You move on.

But yeah, that's why you coach and guys learn from mistakes or what-have-you, just like you do as a coach. You scheme something up and doesn't work, and you've got to realize why it doesn't work. Was it the matchup you're asking or time with the call, what have you.

Q. Obviously Cincinnati's defense has changed and they are creating more turnovers, but are there things that you can play from the first time you played them that you felt like the last time the offense was clicking on all cylinders? Russ had an over 400-yard passing game. Are there things that worked that you can apply again this week?

ARTHUR SMITH: Again I don't get caught up in the stats. They are what they are. We obviously scored enough to beat Cleveland the next week, and then obviously the last three games, that three games in 11 days, we didn't.

But every week is a different story. There's always things you do. I mean, they have their strengths. They are looking at us. They know our strengths as a divisional opponent. But you know, they settled down. We had a lot of early success in that game, and certainly took advantage of it.

But at the end of the day, whether you score, whatever it is, 40-something or you win 17-13, our objective is to win the game, and I think sometimes it gets lost in team sport that he ever phase can affect the other ones. You go out opening series and you take a negative play on third down, and then you lose field position and they start -- whatever they did, like the plus 41 or something. That's not good.

Just like the situation in Baltimore. We didn't flip it; our first drive was backed up. We create the fumble. Bounces forward. They get the ball in the short field. Those are things, like you're all connected and it gets broken down and targets and whatever passing yards, rushing yards.

At the end of the day, though, you are a team and we have been good, we played really well as a team, and we have to get back to that and do our part on offense.

Q. Speaking of every phase, Chris Boswell has accounted for all of your points in two different games, I think Atlanta and the first game against Baltimore --

ARTHUR SMITH: Did we win both of them?

Q. Yeah, I was going to say, how much does that give you a security blanket or confidence knowing that not only has this guy been as accurate as he has but especially from 50 yards or longer?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I think he's a special player in this league. Certainly a weapon. Obviously part of your team, how you're constructed. We've got some really good special teams players that have gotten the ball out. It has not bounced our way, but I've watched Mark Rob and James Pierre make game-changing plays. Sometimes the

ball bounces a funny way. Going back to that Baltimore game, you talk about a huge momentum, it was 0-0, and James Pierre comes back, punches it and the ball goes forward, they get it.

But Bos, yeah, I think he's one of the better specialists I've been privileged to be around, and that is a weapon. I mean, obviously, again, you get into scoring position, you want touchdowns. But Bos hitting the field goals, they all add up.

He's a unique weapon for sure.

Q. How do you balance your play calling when it comes to whether it's Najee or Jalen or CP on the field in terms of run concepts or can any of those guys execute?

ARTHUR SMITH: You go and you plan, and sometimes it just depends how the game is going. In the Kansas City game, I thought we ran it well. The first couple we weren't clean. That wasn't on Naj. And then Jalen benefitted early on and did a nice job with the opportunities.

But I thought we got rolling in the run game. But again, it goes back to all 11. Sometimes it may be the back does miss the track or miss the read. That can happen. There was a couple things that we weren't clean early on, and we go to the sideline and go and make sure we are good at it. Good on those adjustments, and you get rolling that way.

But you've got to plan going in. I think Jalen is playing really well and I think Naj has been consistent, consistent the whole time he's been in Pittsburgh. A lot to be said for his durability and consistency over four seasons. It's a good problem to have all. All three can contribute but it's nice to have Jalen back because that's another weapon to account for.

Q. This team needs to score points. Have you seen anything from a schematic standpoint that you can change that will allow this team to score more points, as well as getting Pickens the ball, as well?

ARTHUR SMITH: Again, the object is obviously to score one more point than the other team. You'd like to score touchdowns on every possession. Biggest thing that helps you is when you move the ball. I like what we've done the last two weeks is what is not turn the ball over in the red zone and take advantage of it. Got to win those critical possession downs.

The defense is going to have a say. It's always going to be true in the history of this game. But when you have your opportunities, you can't have self-inflicted wounds. So you

start there.

Like I said, I don't get all giddy inside. If we beat Cincinnati like we did last time and have 500 yards and whatever it was, 40 points, at the end of the day, it's about winning. To me, you lose sight on winning, to me, you're not doing your job. Yeah, if we can make sure we execute cleaner and don't turn the ball over, I think we'll have the opportunity to score more points. Simple as that.

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