

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. A lot of your guys have talked about Aaron Rodgers as different. Do you sense him as that, and what makes him that in your eyes?

ARTHUR SMITH: Different, like --

Q. They're not used to playing with a guy like that.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, I try not to compare former players, guys I've coached because they're all unique and they all have different skill sets. He's done it at a high level for a long time. I think he's one of nine guys to throw for 60,000 plus yards in this league, soon to be 10 with Matty Stafford, but worked with -- he's the second one. Matt Ryan was the other one. They're all different. They all have different strengths and how they see the game, and that's why it's critical to spend the time to get to know each other, not just in football but how people think. He's been unbelievable.

I guess I've been lucky to have been around a lot of great football players on both sides of the ball. Sean Taylor, London Fletcher, guys we had in Tennessee. They're all unique.

Q. What are some of the challenges of starting over with a new quarterback every year? I know you've done that quite a bit at other stops.

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, it probably helps - you think about my late father - he was a marine. The way he always raised us, everybody knows in the United States, the Marine Corps is try to do more with less, take pride in it. Whatever your deal is, what you got, it's your job to make it work.

It's the same thing in this business; things come up where guys get injured, things that you can control. Certainly my job as a coach is coach the players that we've got.

But it does -- I think when you look back at history, a lot of guys usually get jobs -- when your team has success,

coaches and players get rewarded. Certainly I was a benefit of that at Tennessee, but not getting fixed on like there's only one way to do it, one system; this quarterback has got to play just like this quarterback. So understanding that and trying to be a problem solver and that's why it's so important to get to know them. I tell them that every year. It's not going to be perfect, but it's important that these guys are comfortable, and it teaches you a lot. You can learn a lot from other coaches and players if you listen.

That's what I try to do, so again, how we've evolved, how we're built this year is completely different, not just the quarterback. Really all around, the skill position. But it's fun.

The first test comes Sunday.

Q. You guys threw the middle part of the field among the fewest times in the league last year. A lot of your guys, Pat Freiermuth, Jonny, talk about how they're excited to work through that part of the field based on what you guys have done in practice. What about what Aaron does and the skill set you have in your offense is going to open up the middle part of the field more this year?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, again, it goes back to playing to your strengths. I think sometimes certain things can become -- if you're really good outside the numbers, a bit under your belt, really kind of the coverage you're getting and who's throwing the football and all that stuff, naturally last year that was a strength of ours.

You look at the history of Russell Wilson, he throws as good a ball as anybody who's ever played that position. With some of the speed we had, it kind of naturally happens.

At times -- it wasn't like you're not trying, you don't want to become obvious, but naturally it's the same thing. You get the questions, why are you running so much after 1st down when I was at Tennessee. It's, well, I've got Derrick Henry, and I didn't think it was that smart to give the ball to your best player who ran for 2,000 yards if you still had 2,000 yard receivers. Sometimes it's trying to play to your strengths. You don't want to become obvious. The other

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team knows that. Everybody has the same scout team analytics, the same stuff you all look at.

At Tennessee we did throw the ball inside of the numbers, but a lot of that is how we were built, Ryan's strength. Matt in Atlanta was as pure a pocket passer as anybody, throw it all over the place and touch, and we worked everywhere there. Next year we were different, a little more action, a lot of things zone read.

Then last year obviously it'll be different and this year will be different. I know that was a long-winded answer, but you're aware of it, but sometimes it's because of the coverage, you're playing to your strengths, whatever the match-ups are.

Q. What does Aaron do to make that a strength?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, given his skill set, there are a lot of guys that tried to mimic his thrown motion, and those guys that -- based on their background, obviously his number of reps, that opens up a lot of different things.

The ball comes out on different timing, and that took some getting used to by some of our players. That's probably why you saw some drops. Just trying to play to his strengths, what he sees, those tight-window throws.

Like I said, it doesn't mean one player is better than the other, but Tannehill did more tight window throws off play action than anybody I've had. Aaron has done it in every passing scheme imaginable.

Q. How do you feel the prep for the run game has gone, and do you look at Jaylen as a high-volume lead? How do you --

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, that's another one, too, how they're built. Again, if you've got a guy that's a heavy 1st, 2nd down, there are very rare guys that can almost sustain close to 300 carries a year. Give Naj a lot of credit; that was unique about him. So that's kind of been the history.

There's been a kind of a feature back; we had that in Tennessee. Different strengths. We've got a unique running back room, Jaylen Warren certainly. Jaylen was injured a lot of last year, so he wasn't fully healthy at times, so that probably -- Jaylen is a really unique player. His contact balance, his yards after contact, his ability underneath, unique, really good pass protector, and you had Kenneth Gainwell, kind of a unique skill set, obviously Kaleb is a young guy.

Sometimes you look at the strengths of your room, there's only so many carries, but if you look at the totality of the

season, hopefully if we're playing longer, that's a lot of carries to divvy up. It can change week to week; something can come up. But all three of those guys will be ready.

Q. Aaron said this is the deepest tight end group he's ever seen. What does this group allow you to be able to do, and are you excited to unroll that, unveil that on Sunday?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I'm sorry, I wasn't trying to be rude. Sometimes I don't want to go into too much strategy, let them figure it out on Sunday. But it gives you a lot of flexibility. Same thing, they're all considered tight ends, but they all have different skill sets. Four really productive players who we put a lot on them, so it allows you to get creative with whatever different schemes you want to do.

Q. Now that you've seen Aaron through training camp, what parts of Aaron Rodgers' game are complementary with D.K. Metcalf?

ARTHUR SMITH: A lot. You're talking about a guy that's thrown for 60, some odd thousand yards. He's worked with a lot of different receivers, tight ends, backs. D.K. is an explosive player. Just like anything, they have to build that chemistry, and they have, and they've developed it. Getting things to happen quick -- like I said, the rosters flip now more than they did five years ago, 10 years ago, certainly 20 years ago, but those guys, they've been awesome. They've put a lot of work in together.

Q. Two things about their secondary. Do you anticipate a lot of Sauce Gardner on D.K., and what are the hallmarks or strengths that you would anticipate from an Aaron Glenn secondary in his first year there?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, combined, I think Aaron said that. Obviously he's got his beliefs, and Aaron has been in the NFL a long time as a player and a coach, and so has Steve Wilks. I think sometimes it gets so focused and -- I think as you adapt and your staffs change and your personnel changes and ideas kind of -- unless you're just rigid and you're playing out of the same book, neither one of them has and I've never done that, so they evolve and they're playing to their strengths, and then you've got -- everybody week one, whether it's the returning staff or even looking at us, yeah, we're returning, but our offense is a lot different.

So there's a lot of unknown week one, and some of that stuff, too, is they play the game, maybe it's through the media, may match, may not, could get in a rhythm early on, and sometimes if they know something is not working, they're going to adapt. But both those guys, two terrific football coaches. Gone and get Steve a few times. I've

got nothing but respect for them, and they've got some good players on the defensive side.

Q. Do you feel like you developed Justin Fields pretty well last year and kind of helped him use this season as a springboard for the opportunity he has some day?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's a great way to set it up. Like all the guys, I know I sound like a broken record. I loved working with Justin and a lot of these players. Whether you coach them one year or you get a couple years, things happen. People move on or coaches move on or whatever.

I don't sit there and say, like, I think Justin did a great job for us. That's probably a better question for Justin than me. Not just a football player, Justin is just one of the best people I've ever worked with, take football aside. Very rare. Just a great person.

Q. Aaron has been really complimentary of Zach Frazier and his intellect, how smart he is. How have you seen him develop over the last year or so, and where is his cohesion and connection with Rodgers at this point?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think like with D.K., Aaron has been awesome with those guys. It's so important. If you study the history of this game, you go down that hallway upstairs, and there's been great quarterback play. There's usually been great center play. Look at the Colts with Peyton Manning and Jeff Saturday. There are a million examples here. There have been some terrific gold jacket centers here. There was a lot of things we talked about Zach. He got a lot of reps even for a rookie, but now you've got somebody going into year 21, it'll really help Zach's career going forward when you get with a guy like Aaron and he's got a rookie anymore.

But that chemistry is important, too. That's such a critical thing, center and quarterback, just like getting on the same page with D.K. or Jonnu or anybody else.

Q. In general, how important is the development of your young offensive linemen to what you want to accomplish as an offense, and what do you feel like is a reasonable expectation for them this year?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's a subjective thing. Obviously I'll give you a subjective vague answer, but it's our aim to be the best offense we can. But in seriousness, those guys, the cohesion you build, we've got four young players. Getting Troy back out there, he got his feet wet a little bit. Unfortunately he got hurt. But that chemistry is important. That's what didn't happen last year and some years where

he -- knock on wood, you get the same five guys out there. Just as we keep week one, our job is to go win this game and to keep building.

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