

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. What is it you liked about Kenneth Gainwell, and did you think when you acquired him - I know it's only one game - that he would be a big part of the offense?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I was excited about Kenny G. You guys get the reference; most of the players don't. But Kenny, we watched him, he's a guy that played at Memphis, knew a lot about him coming out. We were watching him coming out, and then last year we played Philly, saw a bit of crossover tape and were really excited. All those backs had different characteristics, and he does a lot for us in a lot of ways.

In the passing game and certainly as a runner, a huge play he made on special teams, I think those are unique traits, helps us win.

Q. How much does Aaron help reinforce the concentration and focus on details --

ARTHUR SMITH: A lot.

Q. -- all throughout the week in terms of practice but then also in game before the snap, everything, and how relieving is it to have a quarterback that focuses that much on it?

ARTHUR SMITH: I mean, really, Aaron is a terrific leader, and I know there's a lot of misconceptions at times, and that happens in this business and really in a lot of industries. But Aaron is one of the best leaders I've ever been around. It's authentic. He understands the team game. You talk about a guy that's accountable. I saw what he said yesterday about the sacks, and there's a lot of things -- sometimes it's one-on-one, it's one guy, but a lot of times there's a lot of different things that go on, depending on whether your help side or the route concept or the timing of it. We understand that. We're not in the blame game. We know we're a unit, and we've got a lot of areas we want to improve on to be the best we can.

He's just a terrific leader. Those guys love him. He's

played a lot of snaps. He's awesome on the sideline. That's how he is every day, and that's how it should be. I mean, it's professional football. Guys need to lock in, players and coaches, and understand the job you've got to do.

Q. You just mentioned those sacks. Where specifically do you see your tackles needing to take a step forward this week?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, it's all of us, so it's not just them. You go into a game, obviously you're trying to play a perfect game. You'd love to have 300 plus yards passing, 150 yards rushing, you'd be leading the league and you'd be having a great year.

Every game tells a story, even as you start out strategically. You've got to adapt during the game depending on how it's going. I think we were down nine twice. We had some really good drives and we had a couple really inefficient drives.

Again, not blaming other units, but that's just situational where you've got to adapt in game, so it causes you to be a little bit more aggressive or pass happy when you're limited a few possessions late and you're down.

So then you talk about protections or whatever, runs, all the little things. Some of it's them, whether it's a block, or sometimes it could be the receiver, some of the angles and the cuts and the tracks. I don't want to bury you with the nuances of it, but that's when you've got a real team and you're not looking just to blame one guy all the time.

Then if you struggle with something, it's our job, both the player and us, to problem solve and fix it, and that's the name of the game. Those guys are young. They've got to improve. They know that. But we know that as coaches, so that's really what the focus is this week.

Q. Aaron really seems to be trying to bring DK into his fold. He talks about his work ethic. Could you give an example of DK's work ethic? Does it rank among the great ones you've seen?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I've been very fortunate to be

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around a lot of great players. When I wasn't coaching on that side of the ball, you see it. There's always an outlier, but most great guys I've been around, their habits every day are like that. They bring it every day.

When you're out there every practice you're going full speed. DK has that. He's wired that way. Aaron has that. And when your best players do that, and a lot of people use it as cliché, your best players have to be your best workers, but when you've got a mature group and you've got a lot of unselfish guys, they've been through it.

It's the NFL; yeah, you'd love to be up three possessions in the second half, and if anything, it's good-on-good; that's why everybody watches it. They usually come down to one score, and those details matter.

On the plus side, going into week one, you don't want to see a lot of sloppy football, self-inflicted wounds with turnovers and pre-snap penalties. We were pretty clean there, other than the one delay of game. I'd argue that helped us win, especially the first time with that unit playing together. Those guys are great, all the position groups.

Q. How did you assess your run game?

ARTHUR SMITH: Well, you know, every game has got a new strategy, so there's a lot of times there's a lot of unknown. You're assessing them during the game; there's a lot of unknown how they're going to play it. Played a lot of man which he had done week one when I was in Tennessee and he was in Cleveland, and they threw a little more personnel groups out there, a little bit of a tendency breaker for him. He had done it before but that hadn't been what he had done at Carolina, and we know that. You've got to have a plan and that's what you've got to adapt. We wanted to come out aggressive. We didn't want to be two yards and a cloud of dust. Maybe we did too much of a deep dive into David Stirling and Paddy Mayne, for any World War II buffs. Anyone get that reference? I didn't think so. (Laughter.)

Obviously, again, came out more aggressive in the pass game, ran it, weren't very efficient early on, cleaned it up, but then kind of adjusted at halftime, came out, I think we hit a nine-yard run, stalled out, and obviously the delay of game and we had to punt.

I felt we had that drive when we had that 14-point swing. Sometimes it is later in the game. You'd love to hit explosive runs early on. Obviously that's the intent. I thought we were starting to wear them down, and then they countered. We had a beneficial drive and then we had the ball last -- not last but enough to go down and get into positive range, which was about midfield, and that was

impressive, too.

So average at best, but that doesn't make you panic. This week, or maybe it's the next week, depending on what the total strategy is, we've got to keep working. Sometimes the numbers can lie to you. There's some stats that mean something. Sometimes you look at run game, and if you've got a running quarterback, you may not run it efficient, but the guy may get 60 yards on scrambles, non-called runs, and then you look at the run average and it's like, it's okay. But that's not how we look at it. It's run efficiency, are we blocking the right guys, are we getting production out of it.

So that area - I know that was really long-winded - but we've got to improve, and that's the name of the game from week one to week two.

Q. Mike McDonald has been on the forefront of some of these simulated pressures going back to even in his days with the Ravens --

ARTHUR SMITH: I know Mike really well. He's not that old. He's about your age. I'm just saying -- you guys will get this because I got to work with Dick LeBeau. I'll answer your question, sorry. But I always laughed at LeBeau, one thing I'd get LeBeau about is who invented the fire zone between him and Don. That was the only thing I could get Coach LeBeau a little worked up about it. I don't know who did this first. I've been seeing it for a long time. Mike does a terrific job.

So now I'll answer your question. What was the question?

Q. I guess my question is in what ways does that challenge communication or execution of an offensive line in a different way than maybe a traditional style of offense?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think a lot of people now -- it's such a copycat league, and it's really just doing the math. If you're talking about IDs, and this is a little subtle thing, too, about people ID'ing it. So if you can bring four, drop somebody out there, so it's not five-man pressure, it's four-man pressure, you can bury the back if you're -- most people are usually in six-man protection in drop-back.

I always know this: If you can bury the back because you don't change your protection or that gets you on an ID, they're just playing math. It's seven on four in the pass game. A lot of times it's going to be spot drop zone.

So those are the chess matches in the games. That's what happens a lot of times on the line if you're not in sync. Guy makes a protection call, tackle thinks he's getting help, he's not, or a guard or whatever it happens, and those are



catastrophic, and that to me makes a really -- you talk about the details you asked about earlier, what makes a really good offense look very average.

Q. Mike talked about how you guys had to adjust to Sauce following DK. When it comes to the secondary of the Seahawks and how they match up with guys, what do you guys have to be mindful of that they're good at?

ARTHUR SMITH: Every team does it a little bit different. Again, you have convincing plan. They're going to do it. You're going to see it early. Calvin made a couple big plays. You saw that. A guy gets into a flow.

So again, somebody has got a match-up you like. It happened on the first 3rd down, they went base. We were in our 12 with Jonnu and Pat, so they had a backer on him, he had bad leverage and we were able to beat them inside. Those are the games that you're playing. We had to adjust. Then with the pressure of the 2nd and 3rd down, we were ready for it. They brought it so we didn't check to it, and DK made a play and really didn't see much pressure, now there's some man things that we've got to clean up.

So those are the games that are going on on the sideline as you're adjusting if you've got a good staff, which we do, and good players.

But that's stuff that's hard about coaching.

Q. Similar to DK, what does Jonnu add to this offense?

ARTHUR SMITH: A lot. He's a unique player. That's why I said, I don't put the tight ends in one size fits all. A lot of that goes down as a touchdown reception. That's a unique rule. But he's a hard guy to tackle. We have a couple guys that are yards after contact guys, and then you get a physical player like Jalen that allows you to use him as a lead blocker -- Pat had a terrific block on that. I call it that last-mile delivery, guys that can get hit at the 1 or 2. When you've got guys like that, you're going to be a little bit better in the red zone, and certainly Jonnu is one of those guys that he can get hit at the 2 and bunt it in there. When you've got physical guys that -- he has a lot of explosion.

Q. What was the World War II reference?

ARTHUR SMITH: British SAS. You ever seen that, in North Africa? Those guys are crazy. They were trying to do all those land things and the journalists in North Africa, like Libya, they were pushing into Egypt, and he was the one that convinced them to start the Special Air Service.

They tried to jump out of planes first and attack the air pieces, and it was exacerbated and he stuck with it and those guys were out in the dessert and they would bomb all the planes and use them that way.

Q. Do your deep dives on that impact your game plans?

ARTHUR SMITH: Oh, yeah.

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