

Pittsburgh Steelers

Media Conference

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Arthur Smith

Weekday Press Conference



Q. Arthur, when you see your defense go through some issues, do you feel like you got to put the pedal down more and take a little pressure off?

ARTHUR SMITH: I think I look at really just start with yourself. We talk about offensively, things come up during the game. Every game, you know. It's obviously a team game, and the situation can change in an instant.

It's the same thing whether you think you don't get a call or whatever it is or you get called for something, you are just wasting energy.

It goes back a lot like life. You got to focus on what you can control. Anything you can control and what you can't, you have to move on, whether it's good or bad. Football challenges that way every week. It comes up, and it's part of the things we talk about, just the mental toughness.

You can't let things that are out of your control affect the game, good or bad, and that's kind of where we start, just look at ourselves.

Q. You guys are starting off games well. Aaron talked yesterday about the lack of not getting the second half started. (Off microphone).

ARTHUR SMITH: That's an issue. You look at last year and every year, offseason, you do a deep dive what you were good at, what you weren't. You look at it from a lot of different angles. Like, what's the best answer? There are different philosophies of being aggressive early, or a lot is made about the scripted, but you have your opening thoughts.

A lot of times situations change. You know, you call for a penalty. Now you're second and 20. If you had a run you wanted to get to in the second play, if you are second and 20, you are going to adapt because you have to get back on trap plays. Or if you get a sudden change, all those things, you are constantly adapting to the circumstance.

We've been better opening drive. I think we have one opening drive in the third quarter touchdown, I believe. Either way, those situations like that, we had a chance to double them up, whatever you want to call it. People talk about at the end of the half we have a long drive, we score the touchdown. They had a little bit of time. They missed a field goal. We got the ball first, and that is critical.

You talk about momentum in the game and chance to go score a touchdown, and now you're up 23-6, or whatever it would have been. That's when we had the third down, what we thought was a free play, but it goes back to the controlling. Whether that was called or not, we still had a chance to make a big play, and we didn't catch a ball. That goes back to that example we talked about earlier.

Whether you agree or not, it doesn't matter. That's not what happened. The things we could control, we got to finish that play. So we ended up punting.

Yeah, those are constantly things you're working on. Those situations, I call them games within the game. We continue to work through and get better at that.

Q. Spencer asked to move inside and play on the line. Do you have another pass to somebody available to do that jumbo role?

ARTHUR SMITH: It's a great question. It goes back to strategy. See if we're out of it, and if we're not, Andy's defense figured it out Sunday.

I did take one positive from the game. That catch to Spence was not easy. Full disclosure, a lot of people asked me, you know, I thought you were breaking it. He was the fifth option on the play. As Murphy's Law works, he got the ball for a couple of different reasons.

You do that, and he's expected to make that play. I did laugh a little bit when he realized. He came out. He's, like, That thing was on me quick. I said, Great job, you caught it, ball security, we got four yards.

Spence has done a really, really good job in all those different roles. In the game, you saw him. He went in there and guards. He's prepared. I've been very



impressed with everything we've asked him to do.

Q. You were effective running the ball in the first half. In the third quarter you ran just twice. What were some of the factors that went into that?

ARTHUR SMITH: I believe the two drives, right, and that was the one we had called the keeper, and then we went quick game, and then it was a third down, and we had to punt. We had the drive, and then we went down there and kind of stalled out. Really there was not a lot of plays either. Again, it's our own doing. So that kind of dictated it.

Then we got the ball back down in three and started the fourth quarter. That's when they made a sack. You are trying to get into that drive, and there's risk on every play. Unfortunately, we got sacked, and we were second and a mile and trying to get it back.

So whether you script or not, you got to change the situation. You're trying to get a play, make it back to get the first down. Then I think we had -- then we were down ten, and then we went kind of hurry-up, different pace. We have a lot of hurry-up paces. That's one where we were probably going to be -- what was it, third and two when we got the personal foul? You look back, and we did it to ourselves. Now you got the ball back down. You're down multiple possessions. That's the unfortunate thing.

Again, it goes back to things we got to be better at. We had way too many second and longs, whether it was a penalty, or sometimes, I mean, they did make a play, but we had a missed assignment. Those are things we have to correct so you're not in those, because that really was a difference.

In the Cincinnati game you look at third down. If you just look at the turnover margin and some of the critical things on the game book, you look at a third down. Alright, where were you at in third down? We were way too many third and longs where the week before we went 7 of 10, and we were riding that medium range or shorter. We have to do a better job there for sure.

Q. In terms of their pass rush, how do they bring, as opposed to like Cleveland or Green Bay already. How do you feel about your pass protection of late?

ARTHUR SMITH: I feel pretty good. I think any time you get into way too many obvious pass situations, no matter what you try to scheme up, you know, that's what the defense wants. Everybody tries to invest in their front. I mean, just look where the money goes around the league.

Green Bay, they have a great edge. They had good rush

all-around. Different than Cleveland, to your point. You look at Indy. They've played with a lot of leads, and a lot of teams have gotten into really almost a whole second half of two-minute. That's a credit to them and their team.

Buckner and Grover inside, they got two guys that can really affect you in the internal rush, and they got young guys on the outside. They get you behind the sticks. They've gotten up on teams, and they get games out of hand. They have a lot of opportunities, and they've taken advantage of it. Probably where they've conceded some cheap, easy yards. Sometimes that skews some rushing starts and pass stats. They're out there playing defense and chunk zones up three possessions, and guys are dinking and dunking, but that's kind of useless stats.

That's a challenge. It's a good team. So like I said, every week is different. I have a lot of respect for those interior guys, and they've been doing it a long time, Buckner and Grover.

Q. As someone who appreciates tight ends, what is it about Tyler Warren that makes him so effective and such a unique offensive weapon?

ARTHUR SMITH: Do you think he's the best Penn State tight end in the league?

Q. (Off microphone).

ARTHUR SMITH: Just curious. No, he's a great player. They're all unique, and he had a lot of run-after and some of the things you see that they did with him at Penn State on the catch-and-runs and getting him to manipulate in zone coverage as the second guy through. You see a lot of that in some of the big plays I've seen him make on the other side of the ball. He's a good blocker.

They're all unique. You saw a lot of things that he's doing now at Penn State and as they should. They put a big investment in him, and Shane and them have done a good job in how they're using him, but they're all different.

I know it says tight end, but yeah, I have an appreciation. He's a good player.

Q. Mike mentioned a few times about settling for field goals and how that impacts the game. What do you need to do to finish better?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, it's all -- I mean, we just have to -- again, some of the penalties we got that we can control, we got to do a better job. So, you know, you don't waste a situation like that first drive of the game or even the second drive. The one drive -- I think we had four to five scoring

 . . . when all is said, we're done.®

drives, but you know, where we kind of stalled out and I say friends, but Bos's range is so deep, but that kind of area we did different things.

We got to stay on track and continue to move the ball so we get in the red zone more. We've done a good job in the red zone, but that's where we kick those field goals. You look at that. You talk about games early on. You can take over a game, finish those drives, and that's been a big emphasis for us.

Q. Aaron had a lot of praise for Roman and said he's had some of the best practices of late. How have you seen him grow in the role?

ARTHUR SMITH: You're always preaching to these perspective. You can give a million examples of guys that it doesn't happen right away for different reasons, guys get injured or guys are behind a couple of great players, and they get their shot. That's why things you preach, I mean, it shouldn't be a shock to anyone.

You got a guy with the right mindset and he works hard, it's usually a direct correlation, and it's cool to see it pay off. We've seen that with a couple of guys. It's nice to see that for Roman, because he's put a lot of work in there.

Q. Time of possession is always important in any game, and you could actually play defense by playing well on offense and running the ball. So you are going up against a tough run defense this week, so what will it take to win the time of possession and be effective in the run game?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, I mean, different ways to possess the football. I mean, you're not going to get in the goal line good and call 12 straight runs. That's one way to do it. One of the things too is being efficient when you are passing the ball and different strategies in that regard. I think one of the best game plans -- I heard Bill Parcells say this one time about the Super Bowl XXV. Anybody know how long New York had the ball that game against Buffalo in the K-gun? Do you have any idea? 40 minutes. 40 minutes.

To your point, yes, and that's the same thing about making sure that you stay on track and you're converting first downs, first or second down. If you get to third down, you're not living in third and 15. That's all part of it.

Then what you are doing and what you are trying to accomplish in the pass game on early downs, that can all play a part of the strategy, but that is obviously the best way to keep a team from scoring is not give them the ball, for sure.

Q. Aaron was talking about the crap that he sees from Roman on the back side when he's not getting the ball. You talked about how Spencer was the fifth option. How helpful is it to have a quarterback back there that is able to sort of process quickly and guys know they can't slack because the ball might be coming to them?

ARTHUR SMITH: That's the thing, just because -- the targets have become such a thing. Sometimes, like, you know, the intent of the play, the coverage can dictate or a guy doesn't win on his route, you have to have options on the back side. You can't just be one and done.

Think of the amount of reps Aaron has in this league. Somebody asked the question about quarterback development a week or two ago. Same thing. He's got so many reps in this league, and guys understand just because you may not be the primary, coverage can dictate. It gets right through it right now, everything matters, your spacing in zone, route craft versus man and the time and the spacing of any passing concept. It's all important, those details. The good teams that's what you focus on. That's what we practice, and it helps to have somebody like Aaron. There's proof to it.

A lot of guys, you can tell them that, and it never happens. They're, like, Okay, what are you talking about? He makes sure in practice. Sometimes he'll pass up to -- which I appreciate. You knows, yeah, I can complete that right there, but to make sure you got to work it, and he does a phenomenal job of that and talking to those guys.

Q. How important do you think it is for a guy like Aaron to project that to the rest of the team?

ARTHUR SMITH: Yeah, that's the thing. You can say whatever you want, but what are your actions? What are they showing? It's the same thing in any leadership role. That's why I give our guys a lot of credit.

You look at earlier this year. We've been down nine twice in New York, came flying back. Cincinnati, even though it was ugly, it felt -- we were down 16, but it wasn't -- guys after that fumble, you know, whatever it was, three minutes and some change, and we went down there and scored.

That's what you want to see, those actions. It pays off because it will pay off down the road, but that's what I appreciate about him. It's things you preach and you believe in, but you got to show it and show it every day.

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